

A STUDY OF CERTAIN ASPECTS OF NINETEENTH  
CENTURY PERIODICAL CRITICISM

(1798 -- 1842)

especially in its influence on and  
attitude to new literary movements

by

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Volume One



The rudiment of criticism is the ability to select a good poem and reject a bad poem; and its most severe test is of its ability to select a good new poem.

T. S. Eliot

Every author, so far as he is great and at the same time original, has had the task of creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed.

William Wordsworth

This will never do.

Francis Jeffrey

We are unlucky in our butts.

William Maginn

For, to treat the subject with the clearness and coherence of which it is susceptible, it would be necessary to give a full account of the present state of the public taste in this country, and to determine how far this taste is healthy or depraved; which, again, could not be determined without pointing out in what manner language and the human mind act and react upon each other, and without retracing the revolutions, not of literature alone, but likewise of society itself.

William Wordsworth

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## A Note on the Function of Periodical Criticism

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Newsreporting is said by those who know to be a soul-destroying job. The book-reviewer, then, must find himself in a truly parlous state. As his function is partly that of a reporter, he is from the start 'damned like an ill-roasted egg, all on one side.' But he is not merely a reporter, keeping his readers informed of the latest developments in the world of literature. He is also expected to be a critic, able to digest, discuss, and appraise at comparatively short notice the productions of his compeers, who will dissent from his judgement, no matter how just it is. So he is like to be damned on the other side, too. What, therefore, are the ideals towards which the conscientious reviewer should strive?

His duties as a reporter are fairly obvious; he must be alive to every important book published in whatever particular field of literature he is cultivating - a qualification which in itself implies that he must have some measure of importance. Further he must be aware of what is essentially new in the works laid before him. These, his functions as a reporter, merge imperceptibly into his work as a critic. As such he has a more difficult course to steer. He has



first to cast aside all manner of prejudices - individual whims and preferences, political and even moral antagonisms to persons - "resisting the temptation "not to let the Whig(or Tory) dogs have the best of it." This does not mean that he must abandon or even forget his political and moral code. They have their place, although that is rarely in the foreground; and the critic must be sure that he has an understanding of the real tendency and purpose of his subject. It is pointless to inveigh against the moral tendency of, say, Marmion or the politics of the Waverley Novels. It is as bad to ignore the philosophy of The Excursion or the politics of the Revolt of Islam.

It is essential for the reviewer to have a standard by which to make his judgements, or they will degenerate <sup>into</sup> ~~into~~ capricious likes or dislikes. On the other hand a rigid set of rules will lead him into some such blind alley as neo-classicism. Broadly the two dangers here are false romanticism on the one hand and false classicism on the other. Now the critic must be sensitive to the intrinsic value of a work, no matter whether it can be labelled classical or romantic, and there is a standard wide enough to include the best and yet exclude the worst of both worlds. "As it must not," wrote Coleridge, "so genius cannot, be lawless: for it is even this that constitutes its genius - the power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination." That power the critic must look for; what, he must ask, are the laws that this

production makes for itself? does it fulfil these laws of its own? is it true to itself? So he will refuse to give the seal of his approval to a work which is utterly lawless, as well as to one whose laws are arbitrarily imposed on it by merely intellectual processes. By these means the critic will ensure that he applauds these works in which form and content constitute an organic whole. The value he sets upon that organic whole will be finally determined by the critic's estimate of its philosophic or moral worth.

This moral value is an ultimate one. But there are proximate values of peculiar interest to the reviewer, because they indicate to him how far the work before him is a new contribution to literature. He must look for new ~~perfections~~ of forms and ideas, not necessarily novel in themselves - "What oft was thought, But ne'er so well expressed." The poetry of Tennyson and the fiction of Jane Austen are relevant cases. To novelty of form he will also pay attention, and he will encourage that novelty in so far as it is the natural expression of the content. He will thus avoid praising either attempts to put new wine into old bottles or attempts to dispose of a poor vintage by retailing it in fantastic flagons. With any writer of merit, novelty of form will be one certain index of novelty of content; and for that too the critic will be on the alert. A great author widens his readers' horizons, sharpening their senses by the keenness of his own, awakening new sensibilities in their contacts

with men or with things, increasing their moral knowledge by fresh disclosures of the springs of human action, stirring their imaginations every way. The critic must have eyes and heart and brain open to these new impressions, ready to welcome them no matter how strange they are, if only they are **true.**

## THEN AND NOW

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Is it merely a trick of the associative impulse, the desire to find unity in diversity, that makes us find in past ages such similarities to our own? In one period at least we seem to see a parallel to our own so close as to be not without monitory value. The opening years of the nineteenth century share some striking features with those of our own century. Then as now, the continent of Europe was devastated by a war, which was followed by an unsatisfactory peace treaty. In Britain the post-war period saw a crime wave of alarming proportions among the proletariat, struck by the inevitable industrial depression, accompanied by a display of ostentatious flippancy and 'disillusionment' in the world of fashion. But the crime and the disillusionment were merely the symptoms of more deeply-seated troubles. Unemployment and poverty were even more rampant then than now; obviously something was wrong with the social structure, and there was much unrest and much theorising on how to put things right. Socialism, under the name of Jacobinism, was as much feared and hated by the party in power then as was Bolshevism in our own post-war era. Somewhat later Thomas Carlyle appeared on the scene preaching belief in the hero or leader.

*the Sp. Hunt*

And between these extremes was every possible shade of Radical and Tory. But, and this must be emphasised, in every rank of life men were almost painfully aware of political issues; new and old ideologies were at bitter strife.

The same spirit of unrest brought first a slackening and then a re-forming of religious and moral standards. Lip-service and non-performance had become the tradition of the late eighteenth century. (Was it not the Prince Regent who referred to the seventh commandment as "Admirable but damn'd difficult?") Then came the liberal theorising and experimentation of such people as Paine, Godwin, Robert Owen, Edgeworth. Not from them however came the new stabilising influence, but from the middle classes. Upwards and downwards steadily spread the great driving force of the evangelical or Methodist tradition. When that force had become truly dominant the Victorian age had begun. We, to-day, have not yet reached any comparable period of stability, though there are signs that we may reach it yet, if the world hold together long enough. (Perhaps these words, written some months ago, should be altered to: if the world can be pieced together again,)

The literary scene is again comparable to that of the twentieth century. A long stylistic tradition had become exhausted. A variety of experimentalists tried to force their way out of the impasse by methods which struck their contemporaries as ridiculous odious or nonsensical. Without these experiments no



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further progress would have been made, and yet the actual path that literature took was not a direct continuation of the modes displayed in them. It would be interesting to compare the first criticisms of Wordsworth and, say, T.S.Eliot; and to notice the return from the side-tracks which their ways ultimately are, to the natural mode of English poetry in Keats or in our younger living poets, or the later work of Eliot himself.

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## CHAPTER THE FIRST

### REVIEW PARADE

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It was a spring night in the year 1802. A storm was blowing over the city of Edinburgh, howling round the tall lands of the Old Town, tossing the branches of the trees in dignified George Square. The rain spattered and rattled on the windows of a third-flat house close by in Buccleugh Place, where a young lawyer and his pretty wife were giving a dinner party to a few friends. There were some clever young men there, the host himself being not the least clever among them, and the talk was intelligent and interesting.

There was no lack of subjects for such a company to talk about. France and Britain had just concluded a peace treaty at Amiens, but it was obvious that Napoleon's ambitions were by no means satisfied, and meantime whither had fled the splendid ideals that dawned with the French Revolution? Were the forces of tyranny - whether represented by a hereditary despot or a military upstart - always to dominate the forces of liberty? Was it really worth the while of the fifteen million people of Britain to attempt to with-

stand the forty million of France? If the foreign situation was unsatisfactory, home affairs were even worse. True, the Irish members had recently made their appearance at Westminster, but little else had been done for that misgoverned and unhappy country. The Roman Catholics and to a lesser extent the Dissenters in both Ireland and Britain were still shackled by the Corporation and Test Acts, shutting them out from any share in local or central government, and even from the liberal professions, and the Government of the day had been formed expressly to maintain these shackles. There were other shackles too, less metaphorical. Britain still carried on a very profitable slave trade, trafficking across the Atlantic in human cattle. At home there were thousands in little better condition than the negroes - the wage-slaves of the cotton-factories and the mines, who were legally forbidden to protect their interests by joint action. Living in degradation, they slipped easily into crime. Felony was rampant, and to compensate for the lack of an efficient preventive force, punishment was drastic, over two hundred offences, including trivial thefts, being punishable by death. It <sup>u</sup>should be remembered that a prisoner on trial for his life was allowed no counsel. Parliament, representing a very limited number of voters, was virtually the preserve of the landed aristocracy. But the French Revolution had sent a new spirit abroad. Men were not content to

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accept old injustices without question. There was an unrest and a discontent which were neither inactive nor silent in demanding reforms. Against that spirit stood the immovable weight of the Tory party. To its members the French Revolution was an unmitigated horror, which aroused in them no spirit of inquiry, but instead a blind terror of all change. The hand of reaction pressed heavily not only on those who could be labelled Jacobins but on all who wished to see any degree of political or social betterment. As our clever young men were all Whigs they had here a sufficiency of political topics to discuss over the dinner table.

There was something to talk about in the literary world too. In the Lake District lived a certain brotherhood of poets who had recently become vocal with a book of Lyrical Ballads containing a revolutionary preface, and with an epic in a kind of free verse. Maria Edgeworth was claiming new rights for women and explaining Ireland to the English. George Ellis and Walter Scott were reviving and imitating the old ballads. Undoubtedly a new spirit was moving here too - a spirit to which the men at the dinner table were not insensitive, although we cannot say that they were friendly to it.

One subject we know these men did discuss, the one in which we are specially interested, the Press. It was one they had often discussed before, and with good reason. Of the great dailies, only the

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Morning Chronicle consistently represented the Opposition interest. The Times was in Government pay; the Morning Post and the Courier also supported the Tories with greater or less regularity. Of the seven reviews and magazines then in existence, only one, the Monthly Review was a Whig organ. The rest were varying shades of the true Tory blue. The attitude of the times towards periodical writers and their remuneration was displayed very clearly by Oliver Goldsmith's connection with the Monthly Review in earlier days. He lived with the publisher and supplied so much matter per month in return for board-lodgings. As this Grub Street outlook persisted even into the nineteenth century it is small wonder that the typical feature of the periodical press was its dull commonplaceness. The critics were publishers' hacks, or friends of the authors criticised. There was plenty of industry, much information about the books of the day, but little talent, and less appreciation of the greater issues and movements of which individual publications were the symptoms. The magazines, with the partial exception of the Monthly Magazine, were staunchly Tory, but it must be remembered that they were repositories of curiosa rather than literary vehicles.

It is small wonder then, that our Edinburgh Whigs found much to deplore in the political wickedness and critical poverty of the Press as they saw it. Their host, Francis Jeffrey, could speak with the authority of an initiate as he had himself sent



several contributions to the Monthly Review. The others, being ambitious, and realising that their political creed was a bar to spectacular advancement in their various professions, had begun to consider the possibility of journalism as affording some outlet to their unsatisfied energy. On this momentous evening, one of their number, an English Episcopal clergyman, Sidney Smith, put it definitely before them that they themselves should set up a Review. The moment was a propitious one. Jeffrey and his companions - Francis Horner, Henry Brougham, Dr Thomas Brown, the future Lord Murray - hailed the proposal with delight, and the conversation began again with fresh vigour as suggestions and plans came into their minds. A sudden gust of rain and wind reminded them of the storm outside. They seized on the omen with great merriment. That was what they would do - raise a storm in the world.

So was conceived the Edinburgh Review. But spring of 1802 had dwindled into autumn before it actually saw the light, and the intervening months had been filled with anxious planning and depressing delays. Sidney Smith naturally stepped into the leadership and under his commands the contributors came like conspirators by devious ways and in deadly secrecy to the printer's office in a close in the High Street, where editorial conferences were held. This method proved to be impracticable and for the second number Jeffrey was officially appointed editor. About

the same time Sidney Smith wrote a letter to Constable who had not yet earned the title of the Napoleon of publishers and was rather doubtful about this new venture he had been persuaded into. The letter contained the following important sentences:

"I have no manner of doubt that an able, intrepid and independent review would be as useful to the public as it would profitable to those who are engaged in it. If you will give £200 per annum to your editor, and ten guineas a sheet, you will soon have the best review in **Europe**.... The gentlemen who first engaged in this review will find it too laborious for pleasure; as labour, I am sure they will not meddle with it for a less valuable offer."

(1)

A sheet was sixteen printed pages, about 10,000 words. To this rate of payment Constable wisely consented, and indeed soon raised the minimum to sixteen guineas, while the average payment became from twenty to twenty-five guineas.

The best account of the immediate influence of the Edinburgh Review is given by Lord Cockburn:

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"The effect was electrical.... It was an entire and instant change of every thing that the public had been accustomed to in that sort of composition. The old periodical opiates were extinguished at once. The learning of the new Journal, its talent, its spirit, its writing, its independence, were all new; and the

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(1) See Lord Cockburn, Life of Jeffrey



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surprise was increased by a work so full of public life springing up, suddenly, in a remote part of the kingdom." Beside this passage we may set the opinion of a hostile group, the writers of the Anti-Jacobin Review, who speak of their new rivals as "a corps of (1) young men, possessing among them very respectable talents, considerable industry, and, on some subjects, sound principles; but occasionally they betray a contempt for the religion of their country, and too great a confidence in political theories. As a review, the volume is in many particulars defective. Neither the publisher, nor the price of the works reviewed is ever mentioned. Instead of a series of reviews, we have in fact a series of dissertations on subjects which have indeed been treated of by the authors whose works are mentioned in the table of contents,...but with very little reference to those works more than to others. The motto of the review is Judex damnatur cum nocens absolivtur; and so anxious are its authors to escape damnation that they acquit no man."

Clearly then, the Edinburgh Review was a novelty and was received as such by its contemporaries. As it became the model for its successors we must consider its revolutionary features more closely. First in importance was the liberal scale of payments which enabled Jeffrey to secure the most talented writers of his day. The original group comprised the wit of

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(1) See Anti-Jacobin Review Vol. 16 p. 213, 515  
Oct. 1803 & Appendix

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Sidney Smith, the political strength of Brougham, Horner's acknowledged mastery of economics and finance. But Jeffrey was also able to command the services of Scott and George Ellis in the realms of romance, Hallam and Sir James Mackintosh for history, the science of Professors Playfair and Leslie, and in their own fields such famous names as Hazlitt, Carlyle, T. Campbell, Malthus, and Wilberforce. It reads like a roll of honour rather than a list of contributors, and it will be noticed that Tories as well as Whigs appear on it. The old system of poorly-paid hacks could never achieve the standing and influence of a periodical to which the best brains of its age contributed.

Further changes were brought about by quarterly as opposed to monthly publication. The Edinburgh Review dealt with about a hundred books in the year, the monthlies with something like four hundred, the total output of the press being in the neighbourhood of six hundred volumes. Inevitably the Edinburgh had to be selective, instead of attempting like the others to be comprehensive. To a critic or editor sensitive to the changing literature of his time this was an advantage, but, for the less able critic, there was the risk of avoiding the new and therefore strange in favour of the familiar. Either way, the infrequent appearances gave the critic time to weigh his words and draw up these dissertations that attracted so much attention; and the mere fact

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that the subjects of the review were selected gave the criticisms additional weight.

But the real weight came from deeper factors than that. The unquestioned talent of the writers, which we have already discussed, was one of the most important features. The manner of reviewing, to which the Anti-Jacobin Review took exception, was equally important and perhaps more immediately striking. The essential feature of it was the critic's explicit awareness of the larger issues involved in the subject under discussion. Consequently the Review became an organ for the wide debate of all sorts of vital and interesting topics. For example, the Anti-Jacobin Review cites a certain article as being "not indeed, in strictness of truth, a review of any work whatever, but an able dissertation on the propriety of maintaining a balance of power, occasioned by Segur's publication; and it may be perused with advantage by those who never saw that publication." Another instance of the same method is afforded by the review of Southey's Thalaba, which was in the main an examination of the poetics of the Lake writers, a rather more important subject than Thalaba itself. Of course, every review did not discuss first principles; the result would have been monotonous and ridiculous after a few numbers. But every issue contained some articles that could be read and discussed with profit because they treated of some general and topical theme. It was this that gave the review such value and interest to the

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reading public. It was stimulating as much as it was informative. In this way also, the paper served as effective propaganda for Whig ideals as no former review had done. The motto, Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur, affords a clue to another aspect of the review. The legal training of so many of the staff led them to deliver opinions as if they were passing sentence. Their arguments were thorough, the evidence clearly put, - with all the skill of a barrister pleading one side of a cause, - and the verdict finally brought in. Their language was bold, unambiguous, and uttered as if there were no higher court of appeal. If the reader were not impressed, he would at least be titillated by the forcefulness of these judgements from anonymous and unknown, but obviously clever writers. Actually many were impressed, and the words of the Edinburgh Review were received as true oracles.

Such was the revolution in periodical writing effected by the Edinburgh Review, and the changes that were introduced in its pages were reflected in some degree in the reviews that had held the field before its appearance. Thus we find the British Critic attempting the disquisition on general topics; the Monthly Review echoing the opinions of its former contributor as expressed in his new and more successful venture; and reviews of later date following more or less closely the form or methods of the great



original. Before we look more closely at the rival periodicals, it will be advantageous to summarise the attitude of the Edinburgh Review to the literary movements of its time.

It is notorious that, although he was a Whig Jeffrey showed little sympathy for the liberal tendencies of the Lake poets, and less for their later Tory utterances, so that he condemned the work of Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge right from the start. In the early years, in fact, the Edinburgh Review showed a marked reverence of the Augustan "rules" and a great contempt for anything that smacked of the sentimental. The later romantics were treated very differently from their predecessors; we shall see why when we come to consider Jeffrey as a critic, but it should be pointed out that though politics play little overt part in the Edinburgh's literary criticisms, these poets were all on the right side in its eyes. On religious and moral topics the Review was and remained broad-minded, too much so for some of its contemporaries. As the years passed, the Review showed a marked loss of flair. Jeffrey would not have overlooked Keats and Shelley for so long if they had been publishing in the first instead of the second decade of the century. The acquisition of Hazlitt as a contributor did not entirely balance this loss on the literary side, although Macaulay's advent considerably rejuvenated the political department. Further evidence of the deadening of the Review's sensibilities

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is afforded by the fact that neither Tennyson nor Dickens were taken up by the Review until they had been widely publicised elsewhere. By then McVey Napier was in the editorial throne, Jeffrey having resigned in 1829, and the second editor had not the critical acumen of the first. Briefly the first twenty years were the best, thereafter the Review became an institution, and like most institutions settled complacently into a fixed track out of which it was rather dubious of wandering. It was not without some justification that Blackwood's Magazine could talk of the decline of the Edinburgh Review in the early '20s and delightedly contrast its tame Whiggery with the bold radicalism of the Westminster. But the Edinburgh Review had by then won its laurels.

Among the periodicals which the Edinburgh supplanted the oldest was the Monthly Review which had been established as long before as 1749 by Ralph Griffiths, who was still its editor when he died in 1803. The editorship passed to his nephew, George Griffiths who held it till 1825, after which date the Review passed through a variety of hands, always maintaining a reputation for at least decent mediocrity till its demise in 1845, only a few years short of its centenary. The staff included at various times Goldsmith (as we have mentioned), Dr Burney, the father of the novelist, and Francis Hodgson, a friend of Byron's who himself wrote several articles for the Review.



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As this periodical had Whig leanings it began by praising the Lake poets, but under Jeffrey's influence soon changed its opinions. Among the later poets, Byron, being Hodgson's friend, was well received. Shelley however was not. Tennyson was ignored.

In point of age and reputation, the Critical Review was the Monthly's closest rival. In 1756 an Edinburgh printer, Archibald Hamilton, migrated to London and founded the Critical in opposition to the other, engaging a fellow-Scot, the novelist Smollett, as editor. To begin with the review lived up to its name and Smollett was fined £100 and imprisoned for a libel on the courage of an admiral. Nevertheless its politics were of the right shade to win the approbation of Dr Johnson, who was an occasional contributor. Under the editor-ship of John D. Collier, which commenced in 1791, the paper was seduced into Jacobin ways. But in 1799 Samuel Hamilton succeeded to the business and induced the editor to become a Tory once more. Collier was friendly with the Lake circle, and Southey was a contributor during his regime. As he and Coleridge were Whigs at the same time as Collier, their early work was praised, although without much critical acumen, but Wordsworth was abused, as we shall see, for reasons that had no connection with literature. One member of the staff, Legrice, was most cordially hated by him. The feeling was probably reciprocal. Francis Hodgson wrote for this review as

well as the Monthly so that Byron was again assured of a good reception. As it ceased publication in 1817, the Critical does not however give us a conspectus of the work of Byron's contemporaries.

Two of these older reviews were far more uncompromisingly Tory. The Anti-Jacobin Review, published by Cradock and Joy, was a monthly replacing the notorious weekly Anti-Jacobin or Weekly Examiner. It continued the heavy bludgeoning methods of the latter, which welcomed the appearance of the Review towards the end of its own brief career in 1798. William Gifford had been the editor of the weekly, and John Richards Green adopted John Gifford as his editorial pseudonym for the Review. He showed his sympathy with his predecessor by printing some lines from Ellis's and Canning's poem, The New Morality, as the text of a wonderful cartoon in which Southey and Coleridge with asses' heads, and Lamb and Lloyd in the guise of frogs were represented among a host of other Jacobins chanting praises before the altar of three peculiarly venomous hags, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. But while possessing the bitter narrowness of the earlier paper, the review lacked its brilliant wit. By a freak of fate at its most ironical, the review was inveigled into praising Lyrical Ballads. But it paid very little attention to general literature, although for some reason it went out of its way to decry Scott and Byron. In later years it became a

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preserve of the High Church party, adding to its title the words, True Churchman's Magazine and Protestant Advocate.

In 1793 Rivington began to publish the monthly British Critic, which right from the start had a Tory and High Church bias. The original editors were Archdeacon Nares and W. Beloe. Among the contributors were Dr Samuel Parr, the educationist, and Francis Wrangham, a friend of Wordsworth's, who was in consequence the only Lake poet, praised by this paper. It spoke well of Byron when it could, but was as often shocked as pleased by him. Shelley was ignored as something too terrible to talk about. The British Critic was in fact a dull timid reactionary that well deserved Hartley Coleridge's comment, "a preaching, prosing, parsimonious, 5 Guineas a sheet old woman." In 1827 it became a purely ecclesiastical paper. During this later phase Newman became editor with W. G. Ward as his chief contributor.

The magazines call for less remark. There was the Gentleman's Magazine which dragged out a peculiar existence from 1731 till 1907. This was indeed the original magazine, the word never having been applied to a periodical before. At the opening of the nineteenth century it was published and edited by J. Nicholls, "Sylvanus Urban, Gent.". The Scots Magazine, begun in 1739, had been taken over by

Constable in 1801 but when he saw the success of the Edinburgh Review he concentrated his attention <sup>on</sup> it and allowed his Magazine to languish. Its ultimate fate is recorded later in this chapter. The Philological Society of London issued the European Magazine, which in 1826 united with the Monthly Magazine. The latter, founded in 1796, was edited by Dr A. Aikin, one of Southey's friends. He was soon succeeded by Sir Richard Phillips who gave the magazine an almost wholly scientific interest, for which undignified pre-occupation Blackwood's was constantly to reproach it. Politically they stigmatised the same gentleman as a "dirty little Jacobin." Whatever the merits or demerits of his political opinions, his methods were certainly not above reproach. He "insulted" Ralph Griffiths "with the offer of £500 annually for the use and good-will" of the Monthly Review, and also tried to bribe Parken of the Eclectic Review; but neither of these editors were inclined thus to mortify their family pride. Henry Bayliss, a later proprietor of the Magazine, turned it into one of Colburn and Bentley's many puffing machines. It was to this Magazine that Dickens sent his earliest Sketches by Boz, only to forsake it when he found that others would publish for money what it published for love. The Magazine continued till 1843.

Critically the magazines were of little

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(1) See Styles, Early Blossoms; Art on D. Parken.

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importance and did very little pioneer work. But if the young author had a journalist friend, then the magazines were always willing to accept a puff. So we find George Felton Mathew praising Keats's early work in the European Magazine. But as a rule the magazines reviewed little, and reviewed only to approve what had been already praised elsewhere.

Simultaneously with the founding of the Edinburgh Review, another periodical of a very different nature was being established in London. In fact as early as 1799 Josiah Pratt had begun plans for the Christian Observer, of which he ~~was~~ edited the first number. This monthly publication, according to its title-page, was "conducted by members of the Established Church", and as might be expected was almost entirely concerned with religious matters. The churchmen who conducted it belonged to an important group, the Clapham Sect, and the editor from the second number (1802) till 1816 was no less a person than Zachary Macaulay. The paper was therefore the authoritative organ of the anti-slavery agitation. The missionary activity of the paper is further emphasised if we recall that Josiah Pratt was secretary of the Church Missionary Society and similar bodies, while Reginald Heber published his missionary hymns in its pages. Its importance as a literary organ is therefore subservient to its vital work in other fields, and actually Byron was the only poet to whom it paid much attention,



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a further proof of that writer's remarkable influence. It is significant of one very vital force in the life of the country that this paper, representative of the most fervent group within the established Church, and the next were both founded from similar religious motives.

Of a more literary nature was the Eclectic Review (1805 - 1868), the first periodical seriously to rival the Edinburgh Review in influence or merit. It was brought into being "by the exertions of a few gentlemen <sup>of</sup> ~~and~~ learning, and some ministers of different religious denominations, with a view to counteract the prevailing scepticism, false doctrine and licentiousness of the age." Before long it forfeited its right to the title Eclectic and became the recognised organ of the dissenting community. After a year the first editor, the Rev. Sam. Greatheed, persuaded a youth of twenty-one, Daniel Parken, to take over his duties. This clever, serious, and energetic editor set the review on its feet, and won it a reputation in his five years of office. He rallied round him a clever staff, of whom James Montgomery was the most outstanding member. That critic's contribution to literature is analysed in a subsequent chapter. Other contributors included Robert Hall, the Baptist divine, and John Foster, another of the same persuasion. Under their guidance the Eclectic became more thoroughly representative of middle-class opinion than any

(1)  
Styles,  
op. cit.



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periodical that had yet appeared. Superficially it had few revolutionary features, for example it stuck to the old monthly style of issue, but actually it was the voice of the ascendant group in the country, the great middle class with its earnest, purposeful belief in an evangelical creed. Like Lancashire, what the Eclectic thought to-day, England would think to-morrow. In 1814 Josiah Conder, a London bookseller, became publisher and editor of the Eclectic and maintained its reputation for stolid common-sense. But in 1829, probably under the pressure of competition from numerous rivals in the field of general literature, he changed the review's policy, making it more exclusively theological, and thereafter it passes beyond the sphere of our study. As a critical vehicle the Eclectic Review's greatest achievement was its early appreciation of Wordsworth. On the whole, however, more sensitivity was shown towards the later romantic poets than the earlier. Shelley, of course, was not acceptable.

A third review with an ecclesiastical tone was published between 1803 and 1805 by Cadell and Davies, the monthly Imperial Review. Its sole claim to attention is its fiercely bigoted attitude towards Catholic Emancipation.

The next batch of newcomers to the field were of a more definitely literary kind. From 1803 to

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1807 Baldwin, who later achieved fame with the London Magazine, published a monthly, The Literary Journal. Its quarto format and clear type were an improvement on the usual styles, but in all other respects it was completely unoriginal.

The Literary Panorama (1806) published monthly by C. Taylor was even less progressive. Its pronouncements were colourless if polite; its politics were mildly Tory; but it was at least informative. Its only original contributions to criticism were to ignore Crabbe and to rate the fourth Canto of Childe Harold far below Byron's other work. In 1819 it was incorporated in the New Monthly Magazine.

The London Review, started in 1809 by Richard Cumberland, apparently erred in the way of too much originality, as it only survived for a year. It was explicitly non-political; it was published quarterly; and most revolutionary of all, the articles were signed. The contributors included the Poet Laureate, Pye, and Crabb Robinson, but, and this may have been the secret of the review's failure, no really outstanding names.

In the same year, 1809, was founded the Quarterly Review, which maintained the tradition of anonymity, but had all the backing that influential names could give it. It was of course the Tory

parallel to the Edinburgh Review, out of which it developed as the discontent of various important groups with the Whig organ coalesced. On the one hand Stratford Canning seems to have moved his uncle, the politician, towards the idea of a new Tory paper. The rest of the political group that had made up the Anti-Jacobin were behind him. Then there was John Murray, young, ambitious, imaginative, just in the position that Constable had been in seven years previously, and very anxious to rival his predecessor's achievement. "As a gentleman and as a Tory" Scott was piqued at Jeffrey's treatment of Marmion, and Southey would at any time do anything against the Edinburgh gang. Uniting these interests was the Tory disgust at the Whig attitude towards the conduct of the war against Napoleon. The climax came with the publication in the Edinburgh of a defeatist article on Spanish affairs, Don Cevallos on the Occupation of Spain. Immediate action followed. Scott, Murray, and Heber thrashed out the final plans at Ashestiel; Murray set aside £5000 for expenses; William Gifford, already well-known to the Government group, was chosen editor; and the machinery of the Review began to turn.

The internal economy was modelled on that of the Edinburgh. Gifford was paid a salary of £200 a year and contributors received ten guineas a sheet, the identical figures suggested by Sidney Smith to Constable in 1802. These rates were much increased later. One important difference from the Whig paper was the Quarterly's contact with the Government. Scott

insisted that the review should use this advantage to obtain secret and advance information from Government so that on points of fact the Tory organ would be ahead of its rivals. This shrewd journalistic move succeeded. In exchange for these benefits however the Quarterly must not allow itself to be committed to support the Tory party through thick and thin; it must in fact point out when the party was untrue to its own principles. "What," asked Murray emphatically "has sunk the British Critic but the base dereliction of all independence?"

The contributors to the Quarterly fall quite naturally into two groups. The literary men, headed by Scott and Southey, formed the smaller and less influential, although Southey made his living by the Quarterly. Murray tried to recruit Leigh Hunt to the number, a powerful indication of Hunt's critical reputation, but he refused to contribute even literary articles to a publication so antipathetic to his political views. Perhaps in this transaction lay the seeds of the Quarterly's hatred of Hunt and his friends. The second group of Quarterly contributors were the Government men, Canning and Ellis, Croker and Barrow, and it was their efforts that gave the Quarterly Review its power and prestige, and also its reputation as a dull and indifferent literary vehicle. For with all their brains, these gentlemen were not critics, and had no literary flair or style worth speaking about. (Ellis and Canning, as far as he was



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a maker of satirical verses, must be excepted from this general condemnation.) What they did have was an immense fund of specialised information which they put at the disposal of their readers. It is significant that the sales of the Quarterly reached record figures with two numbers to which Barrow contributed authoritative articles on Polar exploration. This informative quality became characteristic of the Quarterly Review, and its articles were even less dependent on the works criticised than those of the Edinburgh. For example Southey's Life of Nelson was simply an expansion of a Quarterly article; others were also reprinted as the Life of Wellington and the Life of Cromwell. Authoritative, <sup>esp</sup> possessed of Governmental information, politically acceptable where the Edinburgh was not, it is small wonder that the Quarterly Review soon proved itself the most serious rival that the Edinburgh had to face, and that within ten years it had reached at least as strong a position.

In 1824 Gifford resigned from the editorship to which, after a brief interlude by J. T. Coleridge, Lockhart succeeded. Murray was very determined to have this clever writer at his disposal in some capacity, but nearly let him slip through his fingers when he sent "Mr Disraeli" to interview Scott and Lockhart at Abbotsford. They were piqued at finding their visitor was only young Benjamin when they expected his respected father. They were further insulted when it was suggested that Lockhart should become the editor



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of a mere daily paper. But that scheme was soon dropped and Lockhart accepted the more dignified post. Gifford's salary had risen to £1000 since his appointment and <sup>at</sup> that figure John Gibson Lockhart started. His appointment was opposed by the Admiralty clique, who were afraid of his Blackwood's reputation, but he soon proved his worth by his punctuality if nothing else. He was himself a critic of some merit and attracted some famous names to his pay-roll, Milman, John Sterling, Lord Stanhope, and Lord Shaftesbury among them.

In the critical field the Quarterly was naturally reactionary. It of course supported its own contributors, Scott and Southey. Wordsworth's Excursion was praised, but it would have been interesting to have had a review of the 1807 volumes; there are indications that they would not have been so well received. The later romantics are damned with a whole-hearted venomousness, unparalleled save in the columns of Blackwood's Magazine; literature had really very little to do with it, the vituperation was largely political or personal in origin. From this general fate Byron alone escaped; but Byron was a Lord and Murray was his publisher.

The second decade of the century saw the establishment of no reviews of importance; such as did come into being were of a peculiarly reactionary tone both in politics and in literature.

The British Review (1811-1825) immortalised by Byron as "my Grandmother's Review", was published quarterly by Hatchard and edited by William Roberts. It was this gentleman who was foolish enough to take seriously Byron's joke that he had bribed the editor to praise him. His politics were Tory and ~~High~~ Low Church, and of course fiercely opposed to Catholic Emancipation. The review looked favourably on Crabbe, The Excursion, and, strangely enough, Hunt's Rimini. It threw the whole weight of its influence into the scale against Byron, from his first appearance; and it did not like Shelley or Coleridge either.

The Augustan Review (1815- 1816) a monthly publication, was milder in its Toryism than the preceding paper, but its literary tenets are correctly indicated by the title. Its career was just long enough to enable it to enter its protest against Coleridge and Byron and again to surprise us by praise of Hunt's Rimini.

A more reasonable production in all ways was the Edinburgh Monthly Review which started in 1819. After two years it assumed a quarterly form and the title, the New Edinburgh Review, as which it continued till 1823. It approved of all of Byron's poetry that came under its notice, with the exception of Don Juan, and it was comparatively favourable even towards Shelley's Cenci.

The Investigator existed to be the shield and buckler of the Anglican Church. There were no less

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than three editors engaged in this crusade against Papacy and Nonconformity. Their incursions into the field of literature were rare but remarkable, being made for the sole purpose of condemning Byron to hell-fire, and of telling Southey that he stood in danger of it too.

This same decade, so unproductive of any new developments in the review, saw the beginnings of a mighty revolution in another sphere of periodical literature, the magazine. The movement was initiated by Blackwood's Magazine and developed by the London Magazine. The important contribution made by these two to the history of the periodical is examined in some detail in a later chapter, but a word on the subject is essential here. Briefly these magazines did in their department what the Edinburgh had done among the reviews. They "extinguished" the old "opiates"; they exchanged dull amateurism or hacking for brilliant professionalism; they made a living force of what had been dead.

Strangely enough, both magazines had "doubles", rivals of the same name founded at the same time. Against Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine we can set Constable's Edinburgh Magazine (1817 - 1826). This was a rejuvenated series of the old Scots Magazine which, as we have seen, Constable had owned since 1801. But it made a bad beginning by taking over Blackwood's two dismissed editors, Pringle and Cleghorn, who did

nothing to enliven Constable's magazine beyond changing the colour of the cover. At the same time Blackwood seduced its best contributor, Hogg, who had first found his way into print in its pages in 1794 and made his fame there. Three other contributors, Galt, Allan Cunningham, and D. M. Moir also went over to the new concern. The only gain comparable to these losses was an occasional essay from Hazlitt. Things improved somewhat when the Rev. Robert Morehead was made editor in 1819. A series of editorial dialogues, The Modern Decameron, faintly foreshadows the rival Noctes Ambrosianae. Articles and reviews become more pithy. But the Magazine's dullness was incurable. Perhaps the root of the trouble was that Constable would not finance it. He paid his editor £60 a year and allowed £15 a month for fees to the contributors. Morehead complained, "I do not think you can expect your magazine to be carried out successfully unless they are well paid.... I have felt ashamed to state the smallness of the payment." He sometimes dipped into his own pocket to cover his employer's deficiencies. In 1826 Constable crashed and Blackwood bought up the magazine for less than £50. As a critical organ the Scots Magazine displayed an advanced taste, praising Coleridge's Sibylline Leaves, and all Keats's poetry, which it treated very handsomely. It approved of Childe Harold and Beppo but not Cain, which were all of Byron's poems that came under its notice. Its most serious omission was that it did not extend its



favour to Shelley until the publication of Posthumous Poems.

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Baldwin's London Magazine had as its rival Gold's London Magazine which was bought in by the former after a year. The two magazines were remarkably similar in aims and appearance, and indeed employed some of the same contributors. In its brief life, Gold's magazine praised Keats and Shelley very highly, but made an attack on Coleridge for no very apparent reason.

In 1821 Colburn took the development of the magazine a step further when he acquired and renovated the New Monthly Magazine. This periodical had been in existence since 1814 as a feeble counterblast to the equally feeble Monthly Magazine. Colburn's alterations were on a lavish scale. The poet Campbell was appointed editor at a salary of £500, with Cyrus Redding to do the real work. Contributors were offered twenty guineas a sheet, a rate of pay hitherto obtainable only in the big quarterlies. Hazlitt did not get more than fifteen guineas for his Table Talk in the London, and ten to fifteen was Blackwood's usual figure. Colburn's purpose, in which he admirably succeeded, was

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(1) See The Story of the Scots Magazine D.S.M.Imrie  
in Scots Magazine Vol.30 p.239, 341, 445.  
Vol.31 p. 51, 141, 218.



to obtain a vehicle for puffing his fashionable novels among the fashionable public. But although the magazine was a good puffing machine, Campbell lacked the initiative and courage to lift it above the average.

He was replaced by Bulwer, Colburn's most popular novelist, and though the results were not all that Colburn had hoped, the magazine gained a new power and drive and became for a short time a reputable force in criticism. Bulwer also reintroduced politics, a fiery Liberalism, at which Colburn apparently took fright.

Bulwer's editorial career lasted two years, and thereafter the paper returned to the safe ground of literature. But with a difference. Fiction was rapidly becoming the dominating influence, and the later editors, T. Hook, T. Hood, W. H. Ainsworth, were appointed for their value as serial manufacturers.

Bulwer had contributed very few stories; these contributed many, and the serialised novel became the feature that sold, or spoiled, the magazine. In 1837 Bentley, Colburn's former partner and present rival, founded his famous Miscellany for the sole purpose of exploiting Dickens, whose Oliver Twist quickly raised the Magazine's circulation to heights undreamed of by even Blackwood's. These two were but the forerunners of a host of others in a fashion to which even the older magazines succumbed. The serial and short story interspersed with light articles and lighter verse became the recognised standard of the magazine. The aim was the big circulation, and consequently the appeal was to a lower, more numerous public. Gone

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were the sensational personalities that had disfigured  
Maga, but gone too were the clever satires, the prov-  
ocative literary essays, the brilliant reviewing, the  
thoughtful and witty articles on all manner of topics.  
The magazine had once and for all lost its brains.

But we have jumped ahead somewhat, and the  
catastrophe that overwhelmed the magazine with the  
advent of the girl Queen was still remote when Knight's  
Quarterly Magazine (1823- 24) was running its brief  
career. The proprietor, Charles Knight, was himself  
an interesting man. Before he was twenty, according  
to the Dictionary of National Biography, "the ambition  
to become a popular instructor already possessed him."  
Politically he was an ardent Liberal and Reformer, and  
indeed wrote two of the earliest socialist pamphlets.  
After some experience with two periodical digests in  
the limited circle of Windsor, he came to London where  
a group of Cambridge undergraduates whom he had known  
as Eton schoolboys approached him with suggestions for  
a quarterly magazine. Knight installed himself as  
editor, and his brilliant young collaborators included  
Winthrop Praed, John Moultrie, Derwent Coleridge, and  
M. D. Hill, as well as two youths who were to make  
great names for themselves, Macaulay and Bulwer Lytton.  
The failure of the Magazine was due perhaps to its  
rather esoteric tone, a common fault in undergraduate  
publications, and to its amateurishness, which did not  
entirely compensate for its undoubted brilliance. It

is interesting to note that Sidney Walker, the most sympathetic critic of Shelley, was himself a precocious child, uncouth, rather abnormal, and like Shelley was persecuted at Eton. He may have known the poet, three years his junior, in his school-days.

After the demise of his magazine, Knight took over for a short while the Monthly Review and then in 1829 began his real work with the Library of Entertaining Knowledge, which he followed up with the Penny Magazine, attaining a circulation of 200,000, the Penny Cyclopaedia, and similar works with a direct appeal to the widest public and with an educative intention. Amongst them was the London Journal, edited by Leigh Hunt, of which more is said below. In the year of Victoria's accession Knight began a new style of publication with a Pictorial History of England in fortnightly parts. Plus ça change... At each step in his career it seems as if this admirable man had deliberately opposed with a generous gesture the prevailing degradation of the periodical press.

In 1830 was founded the last magazine of the great period, Fraser's Magazine; and the founder for all practical purposes was Maginn. He had seceded from Blackwood's, and Maga had now grown respectable. Maginn, unfortunately for his happiness, had not; but he had not lost his spirit either. He knew how Blackwood's had achieved its success, and he set himself to repeat the achievement. He began by enlisting

the assistance of old Blackwood's contributors - Lockhart, John Galt, Allan Cunningham, Hogg, D. M. Moir and others. He soon added a host of famous and clever contributors to his list. Southey, Coleridge, Carlyle, Thackeray, and Harrison Ainsworth are typical names. With such authors on his pay-roll Maginn knew that he could give his readers brilliant and varied matter. One thing was needed to secure success - sensation, a contemporary equivalent of the Cockney School, and he found it in the novels of Bulwer Lytton. Over the Fashionable Novels, as he dubbed them, a battle royal began, a battle into which were swept Thackeray and Carlyle, and even Hazlitt, for once on the same side as Maginn. That struggle lies beyond our scope, but it established Fraser's Magazine, and though superficially it seemed the Tory Maginn versus the Radical Lytton, it went much deeper than that. It was really the last stand of the witty, cynical Georgian spirit against the relentless advance of the earnest, moral yet sentimental spirit of the Victorian middle class. Maginn with a journalist's instinct had unconsciously gone over to the winning side.

Weekly Journalism had long held a place in the history of the press, longer perhaps than any other kind of journalism. But the nineteenth century saw it take a new and more dignified form. The important share taken by Cobbett in this regeneration lies



quite outside the scope of this work, but the part played by his Political Register should be recalled by the reader. For our purposes the man who re-established weekly journalism was Leigh Hunt. In 1808, with his brother John as publisher and organiser, he set up the Examiner and thereby brought fresh life into every department of weekly journalism. His paper presented of course the most extreme Radical views, and his outspoken presentation of his case, combined with his fearless exposures of corruption, silliness, and tyranny, unchecked by the attempts of the Government to silence him by crippling fines and imprisonment, soon won for the Examiner a unique place in the annals of journalism. There had been political weeklies before, but rarely had the public seen such a combination of intransigence and brilliance. A further novelty was that the literary and dramatic columns were as clever as the political, and gave evidence of a keen and fresh sensibility employed on a wide range of topics. Next to Hunt himself, Hazlitt was the most important member of the staff. Lamb, Reynolds, and Keats were also among the contributors. The achievement of John and Leigh Hunt in their conduct of the Examiner has been so adequately appraised in its details by Edmund Blunden and others that any attempt at a fresh valuation here would be presumptuous. It is sufficient for our purposes to underline the fact that Leigh Hunt lifted weekly journals to a new importance. As we shall see the weekly was to become the most



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significant type of periodical. It is difficult to estimate just how far Hunt contributed to that domination, but his influence was far from negligible. In some ways he was ahead of his time, but he did valuable pioneering work in that he captured the ear of an audience that had so far been neglected by intellectual journalists, the lower middle class. The importance of that public is indicated in the final chapter, but we may mention here that the Examiner, which reached the highest circulation figures of its time, was the first and, for a very long time, the only journal with any literary content to appeal to that section of the reading public. Its criticisms thereby gain an added historical importance, and it is possible to suggest that the subsequent fame of the poets who, at their first appearance, were praised only in the Examiner was due in part to their being thus introduced to a group of readers whose tastes and opinions were only beginning to make themselves felt.

As a critic Hunt did invaluable service as the constant champion and interpreter of two of the most misunderstood men of their time, Keats and Shelley. Of the older poets, Wordsworth fared much better at the Examiner's hands than did Coleridge. After Leigh Hunt's resignation, the mantle of his spirit descended on Albany Fonblanque, who in 1826 became principal leader-writer, in 1830 editor, and finally proprietor of the Examiner. He maintained for

class of reader who would probably never have heard of them otherwise. Hunt's purpose and performance form a striking contrast to those of the magazine writers of ~~the~~ same date.

A shadowy omnipresent figure, William Jerdan moves across the literary memoirs of his time. In 1819 Colburn appointed him editor of the Literary Gazette which had been founded two years previously and for the next thirty years he held a strangely despotic position for a man of such mediocrity. Ultimately he became sole proprietor and did not sever his connection with the Literary Gazette till 1850. S.C.Hall, who knew the inner workings of all Colburn's schemes, stated that "a laudatory review there [in the Literary Gazette] was almost sure to sell an edition of a book, and an author's fame was established when he had obtained the praise of that journal." Alaric Watts assured Blackwood that it "is without exception the best advertising medium for books that there is." Exactly how the Literary Gazette had reached such an influential position it is difficult to discover. The reviews often bore marks of haste and it was frequently admitted that they had been scribbled at a week's notice. Colburn's publications were regularly puffed and Jerdan confessed that his aim as a critic was to "praise heartily" and "censure mildly". Yet Hall does not seem to have exaggerated. Perhaps the paper gained its reputation by its unique position. It was the

first weekly paper wholly devoted to literary interests and addressed to the fashionable public, and in spite of a solitary competitor it remained for years without a rival in its own field. In 1821 Longman's acquired a one-third interest in the paper, Colburn concentrating his attention on the New Monthly Magazine. The paper obviously fulfilled a need as it survived till 1862 when it was incorporated in the Parthenon, John Morley being among its last editors. In Jerdan's time two Blackwood's men, Maginn and George Croly, were on the staff, and the paper also enjoyed contributions from Crabbe, Tom Campbell, Alaric Watts, Miss Mitford and Mrs Hemans.

The actual judgements of the Literary Gazette are occasionally surprising. It makes great fun of Coleridge's Sibylline Leaves, and while it dislikes Childe Harold it praises Don Juan and Beppo. But it is deeply pained by Cain and all of Shelley's poetry, although it has the decency not to insult him posthumously. It did not review Keats but reprinted his best Odes. Tennyson was attacked quite furiously in 1832, but tipped as the next Poet Laureate in 1842.

The competitor spoken of above was the Literary Journal published by Christie in 1818. The following year it was taken over by Limbird and renamed the Literary Chronicle. It was rather a vague and non-committal production. Coleridge's poems were praised and so was Keats's work. Adonais, because it had reference to Keats, was the only one of Shelley's

poems that was not condemned. Similarly Byron did not find much favour in the Literary Chronicle's eyes, though it must be remembered that it was during his "shocking" period that he came before it. In 1828 the Chronicle was incorporated in the newly founded Athenaeum.

The priginator of the latter paper was James Silk Buckingham, an energetic reformer who had been expelled from India five years previously for outspoken criticisms of the colonial administration in his Calcutta Journal. Subsequently he sat in the first reformed Parilament and agitated for the abolition of the press-gang and flogging in the services. Actually he tired quickly of the Athenaeum and sold it in less than a year to two young Cambridge men, John Sterling and F.D.Maurice. But even their Liberal idealism made little of the paper, and by 1830 they were offering the ownership to any one who would take it. Charles Wentworth Dilke, the friend of Keats, and already a contributor to the London and New Monthly Magazines, bought up the Athenaeum, got rid of the "working editor", Henry Stebbing, and edited it himself. He cut the price from 8d to 4d and so stole much custom from the Literary Gazette. With the aid of such contributors as Carlyle, Hogg, Hunt, and Lamb, and of some famous continental writers like Sainte-Beuve, he built up a solid success and reinforced it by a deliberate policy



of fearless and independent reviewing. Unfortunately for our purposes he ignored Tennyson till 1842.

In the same year as the Athenaeum came into being, 1828, the Spectator was founded to uphold Conservative opinion. Four editors saw the paper through a century, R.S.Rintoul, Holt Hutton, Meredith Townsend, and J.St Loe Strachey. From this circumstance the Spectator derived a strength of character that had been almost entirely lacking from weekly journalism since the days of Leigh Hunt. All these men stamped their own personality on the paper, welding each number into a coherent whole. The Spectator was however more important as the vigorous spokesman of Conservative opinion than as a literary vehicle, thus coming into marked contrast with its Liberal rival. We shall see how its regard for Tennyson moved in inverse ratio to his poetic quality. Nevertheless the Spectator made a genuine appeal to the intellectual reader, and it is an encouraging thought that a paper of such a kind should have so long and successful a life.

The last two reviews which take their part in our parade return to the quarterly mode of publication. The first of these was the Westminster Review, founded in 1824 with Sir J.Bowring as editor. It set forth the opinions of the radical and utilitarian group in no uncertain terms. Thus it came in conflict





not only with the Conservatives but also with the more moderate Liberals. On this account it was received with jubilation by Blackwood's Magazine. Not that Blackwood's had in any way compromised its die-hard Toryism, but the extreme radicalism of the Westminster showed how watery and timid the Edinburgh Review had become. Jeffrey represented the worn-out tradition of the landed Whigs; the Westminster stood for the new force of the industrial Radicals. The keynote of the new review is a boundless optimism; the world is moving towards perfectability, the factories are turning out the goods, the poets are applying the great principle of human improvement to the things of the mind, and all is going to be for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

In 1835 J.S.Mill, himself nurtured in the Utilitarian creed, appeared as editor of the London Review. This was so much in harmony with the previous Review that after a year the two were united as the London and Westminster Review with Mill as the editor of the joint venture. Later the title, the Westminster, was reverted to, and publication continued till 1913. J.S.Mill had an unbounded enthusiasm for Tennyson, and it was in these two Reviews that the poet's early work received fullest recognition. The staff of the Westminster included the most brilliant Radical journalists of the day. Among them we may note the names of John Sterling, Albany Fonblanque, and Monckton Milnes; and later Froude, George Eliot,

and G.H.Lewes.

The foundation of the Westminster Review marked the end of the great tradition inaugurated by Jeffrey. It was the last of the Quarterlies. For many a year to come there was to be no public to absorb a further addition to the ranks of serious political reviews.

At the beginning of the survey which we have just concluded we saw how far-reaching was Sidney Smith's insistence on payment for editor and contributors, and at this point we may summarise the scattered remarks that have been made on this subject in the foregoing pages. Editorial salaries, starting at the figure of £200, rose to such unheard-of heights as £1000. The standard payment to reviewers, by the sheet of sixteen pages, was from 10 to 20 guineas, according to the prestige of the review more often than to the prestige of the writer. By 1820, fifteen guineas was probably the usual <sup>min</sup>imum. The British Critic earned a reputation for parsimony by only paying five guineas. The big quarterlies paid even more than 20 guineas, and after the publication of Southey's article on Nelson he received £100 for any contribution he cared to write. Magazines paid at a lower rate than reviews. Blackwood's gave about ten to fifteen guineas, while at the same time the Monthly Magazine was offering

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twelve. Murray during his brief association with Blackwood's Magazine suggested £500 as a salary to be shared by Wilson and Lockhart as joint editors. The advent of Colburn raised the magazines to the same status as the reviews; he, it will be recalled, offered £500 to one of his joint editors and paid 20 guineas a sheet, and as other magazines rose to power these rates became general.

As a pendant to these figures we can take the prices and circulations of the various periodicals. The Edinburgh and the Quarterly Reviews cost 5/- each and shared between them some twenty or twenty five thousand readers, a number closely corresponding to Jeffrey's estimate of the intelligent reading public. The monthly reviews were nearly all priced at 2/6d, the Eclectic at 2/- and the Christian Observer at 1/- being notable exceptions. The older magazines cost 1/6d, while Blackwood's set the pace for the new ones at 2/6d. The average circulation of these periodicals was probably in the neighbourhood of 3000. The upper limit was marked by Blackwood's with 6000 or more. The weeklies ranged in price between 4d and 1/-, and their best circulation figures were those of the Literary Gazette with 3000 and the Examiner with upwards of that number. These figures make an interesting contrast with those of a modern paper aimed at the same sort of audience, for example the New Statesman, which in a recent publicity drive boasted a circulation of 30,000.

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For an understanding of the atmosphere in which the reviews were written it is necessary to know something of the critical ideals of the time, and also of a variety of factors which modified purely literary judgements.

The period in which we are interested saw an important change in the fundamental standards of criticism. At the beginning of the century the neo-classic code was still the dominating force in critical thought. For instance, in October 1800 the Monthly Review extended a hearty welcome to a full-blown Georgic which began;-

The Spiral Hop, high mantling, how to train  
- No common care to Britain's gen'rous sons  
Lovers of 'nut-brown ale' - sing, fav'ring Muse!

The Review quotes with approval an epic simile comparing frosted plants with foundlings:-

So till benignly rose  
That sheltering Dome for infant-life exposed -  
CORAM its gen'rous Founder, - many a child  
Perished untimely in the bitter blast.

Such being the training ground on which Jeffrey began his career one is astonished only at the mildness of his classicism. This is of course an extreme case, but it serves to show the undercurrent of thought that could accept such a production as poetry. As a more normal feature we may take the frequent references to the laws of poetry. Even as late as 1818 the Quarterly held it against Keats as a fault that "there is hardly a complete couplet enclosing a complete idea in the whole book." The critic in the earliest years



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of the century approached a poem as something to be judged by purely intellectual means according to a preconceived and invariable set of rules - as invariable Jeffrey said as the moral law. Wordsworth was acutely aware of this critical prejudice. As he wrote in his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, "It is supposed that by the act of writing in verse an author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association.... They who have been accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers...will look round for poetry, and will be induced to enquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title." The battle between poet and critic was on; Wordsworth had set out to overthrow the neo-classic dogma.

And he won. The succeeding chapters will show the breakdown of the old creed, the critics' acceptance of new ideals, and the emergence of a band of young critics bred in the new tradition. The basic belief out of which the new creed grew was that a poem was to be judged by its imaginative and creative power, good or bad in so far as it expressed or failed to express the feelings which had prompted it, or as these feeling were worth expressing. The romantic code had its own dangers as well as its merits, and some indication of good and bad expositions of it are given in the chapter on ~~PP~~ Persons and Personalities.



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Of the non-literary factors influencing criticism, the most important, as is evident from the preceding survey, was the political. It was the principal motive in the founding of the two quarterlies, as well as many of the lesser periodicals. That in itself may be counted a point in favour of the political factor, and in spite of the many disadvantages which it involved, a marked political bias was a feature of practically every paper whose criticism was worth considering, the London Magazine being an outstanding exception to this rule. The effect of a paper's politics on its criticism was however variable and sometimes complex. A reviewer might take offence at the political tendency of some stray sentences in the book before him, or he might be prejudiced against it simply because he knew the author belonged to the opposite camp. For example, the Tory critics were actually more friendly to the early productions of the Lake poets than were the Whigs, although reviews on both sides often display an undercurrent of distrust for the poet's opinions. An awareness of the social implications of Wordsworth's teaching is rarely explicit. Neither Whigs nor Tories allowed their politics to influence their appreciation of Crabbe and Scott to any great extent. It was in the criticism of the later romantic poets that the political factor interfered most strongly. None of the Whig critics disapproved of them; while Byron was the only one of their number that any of the Tories praised. Each

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party of course charged the other with applauding only the works of its own members, both with a certain amount of justice. On balance it is probably true to say that the Whig critics were fairer to Tory writers than the Tories were to Whig writers. But the Whig Jeffrey, for instance, could say some very nasty things about the Tory Laureate, Southey, simply because he was a Tory. Other individual critics had blind spots where some political prejudice eclipsed their critical faculties. Hazlitt's abuse of Scott, the Critical Review's inconsistent treatment of Wordsworth, and Lockhart's antagonism to Keats are cases in point.

The extent to which politics influenced criticism will become even more evident in subsequent chapters, as will the baneful effects of that influence; the beneficial effects have been sufficiently stressed here. Complementary to the infiltration of politics into literary criticism was the immense amount of purely political writing; books, pamphlets, Parliamentary reports poured forth in a constant stream and afforded plentiful material for as many political articles as the reviews wished to publish, and they were not slow to avail themselves of the opportunity. In fact, in the average review, the political articles heavily outweighed the literary ones.

Religious questions also loomed large in the

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public consciousness of the time. On the one hand, in the controversy over Catholic Emancipation they impinged on politics; on the other hand they reached out to the domain of morality; and between lay the whole arena of theological controversy. As we have seen, the High, Low, and Dissenting Church parties all had their various organs, and other reviews freely expressed their religious opinions as occasion arose. We need not go further into the political side of the controversies, they differ in no important respects from other political disputes.

The more definitely religious questions present a strange variety of topics, ranging from the quaint to the vital. A modern reader finds it difficult to appreciate the great volume of purely theological literature then published, much of it discussing minutiae of dogma, but much also an expression of the struggle between the inertia of the High Church party and the zeal of the various Evangelical groups. We must remember the state of the Established Church at this period, pluralities, non-residence of clergy, and an absence of theological training were the rule. Within the bounds of the Church was the evangelical band known as the Clapham sect, headed by Wilberforce, striving to arouse the clergy and people from the lethargy and polite indifference into which so many of them had sunk. Outside the Church were many persuasions, as zealous as the Evangelicals and more numerous, but sharing their social and moral ideals, although

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dogmatically the Dissenters followed a narrower creed. These two groups included the bulk of people whom authors visualised when they spoke of the public, the people whose opinion mattered if only because of their numerical superiority. At the opposite end of the scale were the ultra-orthodox Churchmen, a body of which Southey was a noisy member. At the back of a critic's mind lay the consciousness of his own position among all these doctrinal complexities; it is not therefore very surprising to find religious scruples bringing him to a halt in apparently innocuous places. We find for example one critic jeering at Tom Moore for trying to enlist his readers' sympathy in the prayers of a little Mohammedan. A more proper sphere for religious criticism was afforded by such a poem as The Excursion where Wordsworth was deliberately expounding an ethical and semi-religious creed, and there one feels that the critics' discussions of the validity of the poet's belief are in place. It is rather a different matter, however, when reasoned argument gives place to blind vituperation, such as hailed any symptoms of "Atheism."

Where moral codes were involved the critics were again surprisingly touchy. Surprisingly, if we think of the atmosphere of Regency society, with its high standard of manners and its low standards of conduct; not so surprisingly if we remember how far out of the court circle the reviewers were. We are



here face to face with one sign of a deep cleavage in the life of the nation, which played its part in the creative as well as the critical work of the period and at which we shall look more closely in the final chapter. At this point it is enough to emphasise that there was no periodical reflecting the sceptical laxity of the court. Every shade of middle-class opinion was represented, however, and it should be noticed that the much abused moral code of the Examiner group was a code, defiant perhaps and revolutionary, whereas the court set simply ignored morality; that strange phenomenon, the code of honour, being considered a sufficient substitute. One of Hunt's strongest weapons against the court was simply this lack of morality. In passing it is to be noted with regret that to most of the critics morality means exclusively sexual morality, the Examiner group again forming a praiseworthy exception. In fact the periodicals, whether consciously or not, again bear testimony to the tremendously powerful rising tide of evangelical influence. The seeds of the Victorian age were sown long before the queen came to the throne. We find indeed quite early in the century various references to literary habits which we are apt to think of as belonging peculiarly to her reign, for examples: the drawing of a distinction between the books that only father reads, and those that he allows to be introduced to the family library, the fashion of displaying selected books and periodicals on the



drawing-room table, and the custom of reading aloud in the family circle. Bowdlerising it should be remembered began in 1818. It is hardly necessary at this point to show how the reviewers let moral considerations interfere with literary judgements. As will be seen in later chapters preoccupation with the moral teaching implicit or explicit in the writings of Byron, Shelley, and others vitiated more or less completely any real criticism of their poetry. Another development of the same trouble was even less pertinent to literary appreciation, the reviewers' interest in the moral behaviour of the poets. At its worst this interest degenerated into prying and scandal-mongering of a disgusting kind. Byron's exhibitionism encouraged such journalism, but unfortunately he was not the only writer to be subjected to it, as we shall see.

Misplaced and even ridiculous as the religious and moral pronouncements of the critics sometimes were, they were symptoms of a very deep and real drive in the life of Britain. The momentum and direction of the progressive movements of the age derived strength from a new conception of the Christian ethic as a humanitarian ideal, blending an insistence on faith with an insistence on good works. Where that concept formed a critic's final court of appeal, religion became something fundamental, and not a casual intruder into his criticism.

A most fantastic and yet very common type of irrelevant influence on criticism was the existence of some personal relation between author and reviewer. To take only one example Southey repeatedly had the good fortune to be reviewed by some one of his friends and himself as a reviewer disparaged Lyrical Ballads because he had quarrelled with Coleridge. Numerous other cases are noted in the chapters that follow. The custom of puffing one's friends and slanging one's foes was indeed fairly widespread, and must be duly discounted in any general estimate of the criticism of the time, but the anonymity of the reviewers prevented the establishment of mutual admiration societies such as have sometimes appeared in the press of recent years. We must remember too that it is easy to praise one's friends, but to praise them for just the right things remains a difficult task.

Such was the world of criticism in the early years of the nineteenth century, like the literature and life of the day undergoing flux and violent change, sometimes attaining greatness, sometimes turned from its true purpose by surprising trivialities. In such a world how did writers and reviewers act and react upon each other? The following chapters attempt to answer that question for a few of the leading poets of the century.

CHAPTER THE SECOND  
WORDSWORTH CONTRA MUNDUM.

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From the very nature of critical and creative literature, one would expect that a revolutionary date in the history of criticism, as represented by the review, should follow an epoch in the history of creative work. The appearance of the Lyrical Ballads in 1798 marks that epoch, less by its actual contents and manner, new as these were, than by the advertisement which is the first explicit manifesto of the new school. For the subsequent reputation of the authors, it is interesting to note that immediate rumour credited the work to Coleridge alone. Now, he had already made a name for himself as a political and poetical revolutionary. The Anti-Jacobin had parodied his sentimental lyrics in two poems which ridiculed "C [oleri]dge and S [ou]they, L [loy]d and L [am]be and Co." The collocation is significant. So is the omission of Wordsworth's

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name. The latter had so far been responsible only for two harmless descriptive poems, fairly traditional in style, some four years previously. But the others were a group, admittedly working in collaboration, one with another. Coleridge and Southey were the outstanding members of the set, and the most dangerous. Working together, they had produced the Fall of Robespierre, a doubtful theme for loyal Englishmen. Coleridge had since done some questionable political odes: while Southey had followed up with a Jacobinical epic, Joan of Arc, which had attracted no little attention. They were therefore, men to be watched.

And now came this new production, by Coleridge, it was said, attacking the approved style of poetry as gaudy and inane, and challenging the "pre-established codes of decision." Obviously subversive in the literary aspect, what was to be expected of it in the political? What could be expected from a man of Coleridge's reputation? So for a beginning, the political prejudice spoken of in the previous chapter was set in action against the Lyrical Ballads.

By a rather queer trick of Fate, the book's prospect of a fair trial was further jeopardised by

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a personal prejudice against Coleridge in an unexpected quarter. The first notice to appear was in the Critical Review for October 1798, and it was written (1) by Southey. But, unfortunately, Southey and Coleridge were engaged in one of their quarrels, and the former permitted himself a singularly misplaced fit of peevishness. Still more unfortunately, the remaining reviews were for the most part content to echo the criticisms of such a noted periodical.

Southey begins with a just, if not flattering, examination of The Idiot Boy and The Thorn. Of Coleridge's masterpiece, he grudgingly admits that "many of the stanzas are laboriously beautiful, but in connection they are absurd or unintelligible." But, he continues, "we do not sufficiently understand the story to analyse it. It is a Dutch attempt at German sublimity. Genius has here been employed in producing a poem of little merit." His highest praise is reserved for Tintern Abbey, of which he quotes the passage beginning, "And so I dare to hope, Though changed, no doubt, from what I was...." remarking, "in the whole range of English poetry, we scarcely recollect anything superior."

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(1) Critical Review, vol. 24, quoted in Smith Estimate of William Wordsworth, p.30.



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Strangely enough, Southey has nothing to say of the peculiar Wordsworthian touch, of such things as Expostulation and Reply and Lines in Early Spring.

The implications of Wordsworth's philosophy, and even of his literary theory are left alone. Nor could a reader tell whether the writer's sympathies lie with "the pre-established codes of decision" or not. His sole comment on the experiment is that it fails, "not because the language of conversation is little adapted to 'the purposes of poetic pleasure', but because it has been tried upon uninteresting subjects." (1)

(2)

The Monthly Magazine and The Analytical merely echo the opinions of the Critical regarding The Ancient Mariner, but the second likes the ballads, even the Idiot Boy, for their "simplicity or tenderness."

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(1) Southey probably had his own idea of interesting subjects, though it is difficult to see any essential difference between the subject-matter of this work and of Southey's Eclogues, which so strangely suggest a cross by Wordsworth out of Crabbe.

(2) See Smith, Estimate p.32, 33.

Monthly Magazine Vol.6 Dec. 1798.

Analytical Review Vol.28 Dec.1798.

So early appears the attitude of sentiment, which pervaded the private letters of Lamb and Southey at that period and which was to mark some of the worst productions of the romantic age. Only critics of the Georgian temper, notably the Anti-Jacobin group and Jeffrey in the early years, were strong enough to resist the sentimental cult.

Nearly a year after publication, Dr. Burney, in the Monthly Review, passed judgment on the Lyrical Ballads. He provides us with a curious document. Obviously he wishes to praise, because the tales have moved him deeply, but the poetical strangeness, and more especially the political potentialities, of the book frighten him into some peculiar statements. He begins by denying that the merit of these "natural delineations of human passions, human characters, and human incidents" lies in the poetry, since prose narrative can be just as affecting. The Ancient Mariner puzzles him completely; it "is the strangest story of a cock and a bull that we ever saw on paper." The contemporary judgment on this poem is one of the more unexpected things in the history of criticism. That it should be called absurd, wild, and extravagant is only what might be anticipated. But "unintelligible" takes one by

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(1) See Monthly Review Vol.29 p. June 1799  
quoted in Smith, Estimate p.34.

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surprise. Yet the critics were genuinely unable to understand this poem, which to the modern reader is not only clear, but coherent and closely-knit. We shall return to this question of incomprehensibility in another place, for it is one of some significance.

Turning to the Monthly Review, we find more quaint matter for thought in the political antagonism to the poems, which is here first made explicit. Here is a series of comments on individual poems.

The Foster-Mother's Tale "seems to throw disgrace on the savage liberty preached by some modern philosophers."

Goody Blake. "If all the poor are to help and supply their wants from the possessions of their neighbours, what imaginary wants and real anarchy would it not create? Goody Blake should have been relieved (of) the two millions annually allowed by the state to the poor of this country." 2

Old Man Travelling "seems pointed against the war.... The old traveller's son might have died of disease."

The Last of the Flock. "If the author be a wealthy man, he ought not to have suffered the poor peasant to part with the last of the flock."

The Female Vagrant. "As it seems to stamp a general stigma on all military transactions, it will perhaps be asked whether the hardships described

never happened during revolution or in a nation subdued."

The Convict. "What misplaced commiseration! ....We do not comprehend the drift of lavishing that tenderness and compassion on a criminal, which should be reserved for virtue in unmerited misery and distress."

The Dungeon. "Here candour and tenderness for criminals seem pushed to excess."

Here we have an interesting mixture of fair comment and excited heresy-hunting. Of the above criticisms, the first four are quite irrelevant. For example, the success of Goody Blake would not encourage even a child to anarchy; nor would the old man's journey lead any reader to pacifism; the sad goal is a dramatic twist to the peaceful, objective description of the traveller. The complaints of the reviewer are due to sheer anxiety that sees trouble where none is. In the last three instances, however, the comment is legitimate, because the revolutionary intention is present. The Female Vagrant, especially in its early form, written during Wordsworth's period of Godwinism, is definitely an exposure of the conditions that evictions and wars can impose upon innocent sufferers; while the other two are motivated by pity for persons at that period not usually pitied. Insofar as these motives and purposes seem to the critic undesirable, the quality of the poems as such

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will be vitiated. They are subjective poems, and the ideas informing them are consequently within the critic's province.

Yet when all is done, Dr Burney cannot withhold repeated praise for the "fine drawing, the admirable painting" of the scenes before him, and discovers unmistakable "genius and originality" in the book.

The British Critic for October of the same (i) year contained a counter-blast to the hostile notices, probably written by the poet's friend Wrangham. It is rather indiscriminating. On the subject of diction, he thinks "that in general the author has succeeded in attaining that judicious degree of simplicity which accommodates itself with ease even to the sublime." From a political point of view he regards this book as inoffensive, with the exception of the Female Vagrant, the intention of which seems to be "to form a satire against" civilised society.

The first adequate notice of the Ancient Mariner occurs in this review. The few detailed strictures are worth attention, because they influenced Coleridge in his later revisions. Two phrases are dogmatically dismissed as nonsensical, 'noises of a swound' and 'broad as a weft', thereby showing the critic's own ignorance. Coleridge obligingly removed

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(i) See British Critic Vol. 14 p.

Oct. 1799.



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both in 1800, but later let 'swound' take once more its chance in the world. 'Weft', he realised was too technical a word ever to be readily acceptable, and let it rest in oblivion. The simile, 'like God's own head', which made the critic shudder with religious disapprobation, also suffered a temporary eclipse. These vacillations show Coleridge in an interesting, if not unexpected light. But with the passage of time his critical faculty reasserted itself, and he restored these readings which had been altered merely in deference to his critic's opinion.

Put off guard by the anonymity of the book, the Anti-Jacobin Review was duped into lavishing praise (i) on Lyrical Ballads. "It has genius, taste, elegance, wit, and imagery of the most beautiful kind... Indeed the whole volume convinces us that the author possesses a mind at once classic and accomplished."

The second edition of Lyrical Ballads issued in Wordsworth's name and containing the historic Preface is a far more emphatic challenge than the first. The intention of the poems and the poet's credo are explained in a long and closely-knit argument. It is unnecessary to summarise that argument here, but it is useful to remember that the following now famous dicta are contained in this document.

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(i) See Anti-Jacobin Rev. Vol.5 p.434 Apr.1800.

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"The feeling gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling."

"The increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident.... This degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation...."

"There neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition".

"The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure."

"The knowledge both of the Poet and the Man of Science is Pleasure."

"Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge."

"(Poetry) takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity."

"One request I must make of my reader, which is, that in judging these Poems he would decide by his own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgment of others."

"If my purpose were fulfilled, a species of poetry would be produced, which is genuine poetry: in its nature well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and likewise important in the multiplicity and quality of its moral relations."

These sentences in themselves form a very full statement of the romantic code. Apart from Wordsworth's opinion on language, there is hardly a

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statement that any poet of the nineteenth century would not endorse; and there is hardly an item to be added to complete the century's poetic creed. There is first the great emphasis on feeling, on giving immediate pleasure. (Immediate was later given a limiting connotation: the Victorians did not like to have to wrestle with their poetry.) Tennyson's evolutionary theorisings were the fulfilment of Wordsworth's prophecy about the poet "carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of science itself." And, lastly, there is the underlying sense of a mission, the desire to conduct a moral, or social campaign. The purpose of this campaign varied from poet to poet, and even in the same poet at different ages. But always, it was there.

The exponents of the new creed did not have to wait long before the supporters of the older views gave battle, but first came one crumb of comfort. As if to atone for its delay in praising the first edition, the British Critic issued an enthusiastic, but again rather uninspired review within a month of the second. It echoes and freely quotes the Preface. There is one point worth notice; the critic's highest praise is given to the first two Lucy poems.

Who?

The following year, The Edinburgh Review

- (1) See British Critic Vol.17 Feb.1801. quoted in Smith, Estimate p.46.
- (2) See Edinburgh Review Vol.1, p.63. Oct. 1802.

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stepped into the arena, and Jeffrey at once began the long, relentless battle with Wordsworth. He went out of his way to do so; Thalaba was the work under review. In this Jeffrey showed literary flair: his contemporaries still thought Southey the leader, but Jeffrey struck at Wordsworth as the originator of the new mode. Secondly, Jeffrey let politics drop into the background of the picture, and later disappear altogether. A trivial detail may serve to show how influential this review proved; from it was taken the nickname of the "Lake Poets."

Jeffrey begins, by way of contrast to the older reviews, with a general disquisition before condescending to particulars. The established church of poetry, the classical school, he says, now finds itself confronted with a body of dissenters, which has arisen in the past ten years. They affect originality and independence, but have not yet succeeded in creating anything valuable. This fact Jeffrey attributes partly to their poor models. They take their revolutionary thought and sensibility from Rousseau, other features from Kotzebue and Schiller, diction and simplicity from the homeliness of Cowper and the "innocence" of Ambrose Philips, or the quaintness of Quarles and Donne. Again and again Jeffrey returns to this charge of false taste.



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But the "most distinguishing symbol [of these poets], is undoubtedly an affectation of great simplicity and familiarity of language.... Their sentiments, they are determined, shall be indebted, for their effect, to nothing but their intrinsic tenderness or elevation." But unfortunately for this very conscientious idea, poems are not continuously pathetic or sublime, and "on these occasions, a neglect of the establishments of language is very apt to produce meanness and insipidity."

From these general accusations Jeffrey proceeds to the particular case, Wordsworth's Preface, "a kind of manifesto, that preceded one of their most flagrant acts of hostility," and, with a strange half-hint at Burns, he goes on to combat the heresy. "The language of the vulgar....must seem unfit for poetry, (if there were no other reason) merely because it has scarcely ever been employed in it. A great genius may indeed overcome these disadvantages; but we scarcely conceive that he should court them." Novelty, therefore, is a mistake. Furthermore, "it is absurd to suppose, that an author should make use of the language of the vulgar to express the sentiments of the refined." Consequently Wordsworth is confined to humble subjects. Now if one contrasts the sentiments of the refined and of a "clown, a tradesman, or a market-wench....which of them is

the most proper object for poetical imitation?" And Jeffrey begs the question by dogmatically asserting that the sentiments and language of the poor cannot be interesting as poetry, if realistically presented; and this, "not merely because poverty makes men ridiculous, but because just taste and refined sentiment are rarely to be met with among the uncultivated parts of mankind: and a language fitted for their expression, can still more rarely form any part of their 'ordinary conversation.'" This point is developed at some length, and leads Jeffrey to the typical classical position that art, the best art, takes its subject from the excellent, not from the ordinary.

The reviewer then returns to the weaknesses of the romantic poets in general: their "perpetual exaggeration of thought....All their characters must be in agonies and ecstasies, from their entrance to their exit." In addition, he dislikes their moral characteristics, their discontent with existing institutions. "For all sorts of vice and profligacy in the lower orders of society, they have the same virtuous horror, and the same tender compassion. While the existence of these offences overpowers them with grief and confusion, they never permit themselves to feel the smallest indignation or dislike towards the offenders. The present vicious constitution of society alone is responsible." The absurdity and

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partiality of this attitude are both reprehensible.

Thereafter Jeffrey turns to Thalaba itself.

From this review it is possible to deduce most of the arguments of the pre-established code that Wordsworth knew he was offending. Foremost is the dislike of anything recherche, whether in thought or emotion or diction. This is seen in the constant objection of the conservative critics to imitations of the more hectic elements in Goethe or Kotzebue, and to vocabulary or style borrowed from the ballad-writers or the seventeenth century poets. Similarly, distrust of innovation forms part of this code. The new is unacceptable, because there is no precedent whereby it may be estimated, and no successes or failures whereby the author may be guided. As a third item may be added the ideal of golden mediocrity, the positive aspect of the previous negatives. Restraint and balance are the classical virtues, difficult to maintain. The poet must permit himself just enough emotion, just enough sublimity. The classical insistence on the "imitation of the excellent" is not in real conflict with this aim, for the excellent is but the perfection, sometimes the almost inhuman perfection of that balance.

The only point of agreement between Wordsworth and Jeffrey is that the aim of poetry is pleasure.

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With the appearance of Poems in Two Volumes in 1807, Wordsworth made his final effective contribution to contemporary literature. The work of the nine years 1798 to 1807 gave a full display of Wordsworth's power, both in accordance with and in opposition to his own theory. By the time of his next appearance, 1814, Byron had initiated a still newer school of poetry.

Strangely enough it was Byron himself who wrote the first notice of the 1807 Poems. (1) It was perhaps the most favourable, though not the best review of the work.

"The characteristics of Mr. Wordsworth's muse are simple and flowing, though occasionally in-harmonious verse; strong, and sometimes irresistible appeals to the feelings, with unexceptional sentiments ....totally devoid of the tinsel embellishments and abstract hyperboles of several contemporary sonneteers." Byron goes on to praise the Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle, the Seven Sisters, and the Affliction of Margaret. But Moods of My Own Mind receive less gentle treatment. "We certainly wish these moods had been less frequent... When Mr Wordsworth ceases to please, it is by 'abandoning' his mind to the most commonplace ideas, at the same time clothing them in language not simple, but puerile."

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(1) See Monthly Literary Recreations, July 1807  
Quoted in Smith, Estimate p.70.



Examples are quoted, and the words namby-pamby, and innocent used to describe them. But the concluding sentence is handsome enough: "Many, with inferior abilities, have acquired a loftier seat on Parnassus, merely by attempting strains in which Wordsworth is more qualified to excel."

The personal element reappears very distinctly in the article in the Critical Review, but it was not Southey's fault this time. "There is," wrote Wordsworth to his friend Wrangham, "a most malignant spirit (his fleshly name is Legrice) whose gall and venom are discharged upon the public through that review. This wretch, for such I cannot but call him, has taken Coleridge, his quondam school-fellow at Christ's Hospital,...into his most deadly hatred, and persecutes him upon all occasions, in which hatred all Coleridge's friends have a share, and I among the rest." Legrice, or some fellow-spirit, was responsible for a review, which was not only malignant but unintelligent.

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It begins emphatically: "A silly book is a serious evil; but it becomes absolutely insupportable when written by a man of sense." An old complaint follows. "Unfortunately, he is only one of

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(1) See Critical Review August, 1807. & Smith, Estimate p.73.

(2) See Smith, Estimate, p.72.

a tribe who keep each other in countenance by mutual applause and flattery, and who having dubbed themselves by the name of poets, imagine they have a right to direct the taste of the nation, and thus, infinitely to their own satisfaction, abuse the good sense and weary out the patience of mankind with their fantastical nummeries."

The reviewer goes on to accuse Wordsworth of excessive sentiment, irrationality, over-weening vanity, and affected singularity. These faults are lamented because Wordsworth once had in him the emotions, virtues, and powers that go to make a great poet. The reviewer looks back with delight to Tintern Abbey, the Evening Sail to Richmond, and Michael.

"We wish that we could say as much of any one of the numerous specimens now before us....[Wordsworth] must undergo a certain term of rigid penance and inward mortification; before he can become what he once promised to be, the poet of the heart, and not the capricious minion of a debasing affectation.... Is it possible for Mr. Wordsworth not to ~~fall~~ that while he is pouring out his nauseous and nauseating sensibilities to weeds and insects, he debases himself to a level with his idiot boy, infinitely below his pretty Celandine and little butterfly?" He is advised to study more and brood less, before being dismissed with an insolent pat on the back: "We here and there

discover symptoms of reason and judgment, which we gladly hail as a proof that his mind is not yet irrecoverably lost in the vortex of false taste and puerile conceit."

Virulence of this type defeats its own ends. Any school of critical thought can find in the 1807 volumes something that is not only unimpeachable but excellent; and not to rescue a single poem from the flood of condemnation is too obviously disingenuous. But in addition, the attack is quite amorphous; it is a stream of vituperation, not a logical sequence of destructive criticism.

A striking contrast is provided by Jeffrey's return to the fray. The criticism in the Edinburgh Review was just as hostile as that in Legrice's paper, and sometimes just as rude; but it is far more damaging, because it is argued to a finish. No better parallel could be chosen to demonstrate the differences between the new reviewing and the old. The very similarity of the two judgments shows what a gap the Edinburgh filled, what a need it satisfied.

Jeffrey's long examination of the Poems (1)

(1) See Edinburgh Review Vol.II p. Oct. 1807, quoted in Smith, Estimate p.76. But Dr. Smith has omitted Jeffrey's disquisition on pleasure in poetry, and, more vital, the passages quoted for censure by Jeffrey, and many of the comments on the individual poems, making it impossible to gather from her work

begins, significantly, by stating that the author is generally recognised as the purest model of the Lake School, and continues:-

"The Lyrical Ballads were unquestionably popular, and, we have no hesitation in saying it, deservedly popular; for in spite of their occasional vulgarity, affectation, and silliness, they were undoubtedly characterised by a strong spirit of originality, of pathos, and natural feeling." This combination of genius and bad taste has caused some "admiration for the very defects" of Wordsworth; for which reason Jeffrey finds it necessary to oppose "this alarming innovation."

He then makes a challenge to Wordsworth, with the public as arbiters. "If these volumes.... turn out to be nearly as popular as the Lyrical Ballads....we shall admit that Mr Wordsworth has come much nearer the truth in his judgment of what constitutes the charm of poetry, than we had previously imagined - and shall institute a more serious and respectful inquiry into his principles of composition than we have yet thought necessary."

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that Jeffrey's criticism influenced Wordsworth at all. This is the only occasion on which this excellent compilation is at all misleading, an indication of the care that has gone to its making.



Starting from their one point of agreement, that poetry should give pleasure, Jeffrey traces that pleasure to three sources, the excitation of the emotions, the play of Imagination, and the character of the diction. It is, of course, about the last that he must take the Lakists to task. "It has evidently cost them much pains to keep down to the standard." Secondly, Wordsworth courts "literary martyrdom by.... connecting his most lofty, tender, or impassioned conceptions, with objects and incidents, which the greater part of his readers will probably persist in thinking low, silly, or uninteresting.... Such associations will always appear forced, strained, and unnatural."

There follows a detailed examination, poem by poem, hostile towards all except the sonnets and a few others. The epithets feeble, affected, and unintelligible ~~from~~ the burden of the piece, and references to Ambrose Philips occur more than once. The vital importance of this review, however, is that Wordsworth apparently paid attention to it and amended the offending lines again and again. Wordsworth is generally credited with an absolute imperviousness to criticism. In the deep things of his art this was the case. But here, in this matter of individual words and lines, he shows himself as pliable even as Tennyson. The actual changes are

dealt with in detail in an Appendix.

Apart from the poems selected for praise, Jeffrey's general verdict is, guilty of "childishness and insipidity." "It is impossible not to feel a mixture of indignation and compassion, at that strange infatuation which has bound [Wordsworth] up from the fair exercise of his talents, and with-held from the public the many excellent productions that would otherwise have taken the place of the trash now before us."

Even from such an abbreviated version as the above, one cannot but see how constantly logical Jeffrey is. He does not merely dislike Wordsworth; he proves that he is right in disliking him.

The Annual Review is much the most polite so far (Southey's influence may have helped here), and its criticism also proceeds upon a regular plan based on genuine ideas. The critic begins by combating the 1800 Preface, and makes one very good point, that Wordsworth's arguments in favour of rhyme and metre are equally true of poetic diction. His heresy in this matter is traced mainly to a confusion of

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(1) See Annual Review Vol. 6 1807 &  
Smith, Estimate p.85.

rhetical and poetical diction: "The former it is that offends: but in his blind zeal he confounds both under the same note of reprobation."

Nor is the critic content with Wordsworth's definition of a poet; the fundamental quality seems to be omitted. The critic himself is rather vague about that quality, finding great difficulty in giving it a name, but it is fairly clear that he means what Coleridge was to call the "shaping spirit of Imagination."

Turning to the present volumes, the reviewer finds himself displeased with nearly all the narrative poems. Of Fidelity he says, "The language is not only prosaic, but generally flat, and in some parts absolutely mean....But, what is worse still, is the coldness and tameness of the sentiments." The other poems suffer from the same faults, and "in general are extremely ill-rhymed....One who trusts so much to mere metre, should take a little more pains with it." The sonnets are, however, approved.

It is interesting to notice the opinions expressed here on Moods of My Own Mind. On the one hand, "When a man endeavours to make his reader enter into an association that exists in his own mind between daffodils waving in the wind, and laughter.... he fails and is sure to fail." On the other hand, "When he takes for his theme the youthful feelings

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connected with the sight of a butterfly, and the song of the cuckoo, he has struck a right key." This seems to us, wise after the event, a strange and narrowing limitation.

There is further evidence of a good critic gone blind in the cruel kindness of the concluding paragraph: "Mr. Wordsworth doubtless possesses a reflecting mind, and a feeling heart; but nature seems to have bestowed on him little of the fancy of a poet, and a foolish theory deters him from displaying even that little." This is the only criticism of them all that denies Wordsworth the essentials of poetic greatness.

There remains one major notice of the 1807 Poems. It appeared in the Eclectic Review, the author (1) being James Montgomery, the poet and hymn-writer. He displays a poetic tact and judgment, especially in handling the vexed question of poetic diction, unequalled even by the great Jeffrey himself. He does not admire easily, indeed he condemns freely, but he

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(1) See Eclectic Review Vol.4, pt.I  
Jan. 1808. &

Smith, Estimate p.92.

Batho, The Later Wordsworth  
decides the authorship.



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praises the most typically Wordsworthian pieces in terms of singular felicity.

The review begins with the apparently obligatory glance at the 1800 Preface, which it condemns in a tone of offended dignity: "Nor are [a Poet's] compositions the prompt and spontaneous expressions of his own everyday feelings....No. They are the most hidden ideas of his soul, discovered in his selectest language. Will such a man array the most pure, sublime, and perfect conceptions of his superior mind in its highest fervour, only with 'the real language of men in a state of excitement'?...

"Mr. Wordsworth is himself a living example of the power which a man of genius possesses, of awakening unknown and ineffable sensations in the hearts of his fellow-creatures. His Cumberland Beggar, Tintern Abbey, his Verses on the Naming of Places.... have taught us new sympathies, the existence of which in our nature had scarcely been intimated to us by any preceding poet....In these his most successful pieces, he has attired his thoughts in diction of transcendent beauty." The passage concerning the "still sad music of humanity" is quoted by way of example, and Montgomery continues: "This is no more the language, than these are the thoughts of men in general in a state of excitement: language more exquisitely elaborate, and thoughts more patiently worked out of the very marble of the mind, we rarely

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meet with in any writer of either verse or prose."

It was not easy for an outsider in 1808 to appreciate these things in just this way.

The volumes actually under review are much less agreeable to this critic. Particularly he laments the total absence of Wordsworth's glorious blank verse. He dislikes the attempted playfulness of much of the work: "The Poet's mind seems to be delightfully dreaming, while his thoughts are romping at random, and playing all manner of mischievous pranks about him.. ..A more rash and injudicious speculation on the weakness or the depravity of the public taste has seldom been made, and we trust that its inevitable failure will bring back Mr. Wordsworth himself to a sense of his own dignity."

Alice Fell, The Blind Boy, and Fidelity are all dismissed with a word of reprobation. The Sonnets, while good in imagery and sentiment, "are exceedingly unequal, often obscure, and generally heavy in the motion of the verse." That on the Venetian Republic is excepted from this general charge.

Two interesting judgments follow: "A specimen of Mr. Wordsworth's finest talent - that of personal description - may be found in a Poem,

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which we have not room to quote, though we consider it the best in the volume, entitled Resolution and Independence.

"The last piece in this Collection is simply styled An Ode, and the reader is turned loose into a wilderness of sublimity, tenderness, bombast, and absurdity, to find out the subject as well as he can." A quotation follows, and the passage this remarkable critic has chosen is that beginning 'Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.'

From these summaries it is possible to make some estimate of the changing critical attitude towards Wordsworth.

Lyrical Ballads did not get a good press, yet it made its way. Because of this success, all the critics were ready to praise it by 1807, even Jeffrey saying it was "deservedly popular". A further result was that the new volumes received more and longer criticisms, Wordsworth was now a name to be taken seriously. But their previous miscalculation of public taste did not lead the critics into acceptance of the new volumes. The general view was that these were a retrogression from the standard of the earlier publication, and undoubtedly the critics were right. There is more great poetry in the 1800 volumes than in the 1807.

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As far as can be made out, only one notice, that in the Critical, is influenced by non-literary factors to any great extent. The political horizon has completely changed; Wordsworth and his critics share the political views expressed in the Sonnets, which are further recommended by being in an idiom with which they are familiar. On this count, then, Wordsworth can expect reasonably fair treatment. It is notable too, that out of seven reviews, only two are derivative, while for the Lyrical Ballads three out of five reviews were mere echoes.

Turning to the actual literary content of the reviews, we find a singular unanimity in their pre-occupation with Wordsworth's theory of diction. The poet of course had himself to blame for having laid so much stress on it, but practically every reviewer takes it for granted that everything Wordsworth wrote was in the simple style. Wordsworth may have bluffed himself into this belief; he certainly bluffed all his critics except Jeffrey and James Montgomery. Even Jeffrey is a doubtful exception, for, although he says Wordsworth can always write good verses "when he is led to abandon his system," yet he limits his instances to the sonnets and Brougham Castle where Wordsworth has obviously to follow more elaborate conventions. No mention is



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made of any independent departure from the theory in poems where Wordsworth was not following a model. Montgomery of course refuses to take the poet at his word, and proves his case with devastating thoroughness. The same critic's argument against the theory is perhaps the only valid one offered at the time, or since. Coleridge, too, it will be remembered, made Wordsworth's departure in practice from his own ideal a fundamental part of his great argument against the theory. But none of the critics comes within measurable distance of that insight which saw the fallacy on which the whole argument of the Preface was based. It was impossible for a reviewer to give the question the long and arduous thought required to reach so brilliant an answer. For the most part, the contemporary judges, after admitting that it would be advisable to sweep away the tinsel embellishments of Darwinian, and kindred phraseologies, think they have been sufficiently radical. Language unlike the real language of men has always been used in poetry, therefore poetic diction is a right and proper thing, if rightly used; and that is a satisfactory argument for most people, then or now. To find out why such diction should always have been used lay beyond the scope of the reviewers.

Most of the reviews, even the Critical,

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expressed the hope that their aspersions would affect the poet's future productions, a hope that was doomed to disappointment. Jeffrey, if he looked carefully into the 1815 volumes, might have found cause to congratulate himself. To the others, Wordsworth remained obstinately deaf, and his style, though changed, was still Wordsworth's.

In the long silent interval between 1807 and 1814, Wordsworth's reputation was under-going a subtle change for the better, to which three different factors probably contributed. Firstly, a new generation had grown up in the sixteen years between the Lyrical Ballads and the Excursion, and to it Wordsworth was not a young revolutionary, but an established and well-known figure. Secondly, even the older generation had had time to grow accustomed to the Lake idiom, and as its strangeness wore off, so its vices seemed to diminish and its virtues to increase. In the third place, the newer modes of 1814 were stranger and more startling. An old accustomed style, like Wordsworth's, appeared quite mild beside them. Wordsworth gave added force to this current of opinion by the increasing orthodoxy of his thinking at the later period. This change in public opinion is faithfully reflected in

the reception given to the Excursion. How far this new attitude on the part of the reviews represents a genuine change of heart is a nice question. The attitude of the actual reviewers is genuine enough, as most of those who criticised the new work were acknowledged Wordsworthians.

A foretaste of the coming revolution was given in the Quarterly Review for April, 1814, in an article on Coleridge's Remorse. In the course of this notice the difficulty in understanding the Lake Poets is said to have come about because none of them has taken the trouble to state briefly and plainly the philosophic basis of their poetry, which omission the critic will correct. He refers first to the minuteness of their analysis of emotion. "By this method they have sacrificed the chance of general popularity for the devoted admiration of a few." But this introspectiveness has further drawbacks; the heart becomes over-susceptible. Too great importance is attached to the consequent emotions, and to their objects. Worst of all, introspection "tends to produce....a variation from nature amounting almost to distortion.

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(1) See Quarterly Review &  
Smith, Estimate p.129.

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The man who is for ever examining his feet, as he walks, will probably soon move in a stiff and constrained pace; and if we are constantly on the watch to discover the nature, order, and cause of our slightest emotions, it can scarcely be expected that they will operate in their free course or natural direction."

The review then gives the first account of the peculiar Wordsworthian attitude to Nature. That an attempt should at last be made to understand this philosophy is most significant. Here is the Quarterly's account of the Lakist outlook:-

"They are not the tasteful admirers of nature, not the philosophic calculators on the extent of her riches, ....In her silent solitudes, on the bosom of her lakes, in the dim twilight of her forests, they are surrendered up passively to the scenery around them, they seem to feel a power, an influence invisible and indescribable, which at once burthens and delights, exalts and purifies the soul. All the features and appearances of nature in their poetical creed possess a sentient and intellectual being, and exert an influence for good upon the hearts of her worshippers. Nothing can be more poetical than this feeling; but it is the misfortune of this school that their excellences are carried to an excess. Hence they



constantly attribute not merely physical, but moral animation to nature."

To a modification of this same principle the reviewer traces Wordsworth's thoughts on infancy, and makes in passing the first appreciative reference to the Immortality Ode. The critics are indeed moving. But some new turns are suggested in the movement by the two following quotations:-

"The tenet [Heaven lies about us in our infancy]" itself is strictly imaginative; its truth as a matter of philosophy, may well be doubted; certainly in the extent in which they take it, it does not rest on Scripture foundation."

"It appears to us that chance or a congenial mode of thinking has brought into intimate connections minds of very distinct powers and peculiarities....Mr. Southey, for instance, appears to us more active, and playful, than those with whom his name is here associated."

A few months later came The Excursion itself, and the first critic in the field was none other than Hazlitt. His attitude was "modified rapture." The review opens with high praise: "In power of intellect, in lofty conception, in the depth of feeling, at once simple, and sublime, which pervades every part of it, and which gives to every object an almost preterhuman interest, this work has seldom

See note  
(1) overleaf.

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been surpassed. The poem of The Excursion resembles that part of the country in which the scene is laid. It has the same vastness and magnificence, overwhelming, oppressive power."

This comparison is developed at some length, and it should be noticed carefully as a typical example of the new romantic criticism, of which Hazlitt was the greatest exponent, though Lamb in his notes on the drama had already shown the way. The method is that of subjective appreciation, as opposed to the older objective appraisalment. Hazlitt makes it his first concern to communicate the 'feel' of the work under review. Judgment can come later.

It would seem that Hazlitt was instinctively driven to this method of dealing with romantic literature, for he continues: "It is less a poem on the country than on the love of the country. It is not so much a description of natural objects as of the feelings associated with them.... [The poet] paints the outgoings of his own heart, the shapings of his own fancy....His thoughts are his real subjects."

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(1) See The Examiner Aug. 21st., 28th., and  
Oct., 2nd., 1814 &  
Smith, Estimate p.147.

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When the critic passes to the characters of the poem, he makes an effective point: "An intense intellectual egotism swallows up everything... The recluse, the pastor, and the pedlar, are three persons in one poet.... It is as if there were nothing but himself and the universe."

Hazlitt dislikes this absence of dramatic power, and still more the intrusion of the narrative which interferes with the sequence of the philosophical reasoning. A purely didactic poem would have been better. Hazlitt was indeed right, and The Prelude his justification. Wordsworth's general avoidance of striking and tragic incident, for example in the stories told over the graves of the villagers, is also attributed to his egotism, "a systematic unwillingness to share the palm with his subject."

After some haphazard remarks on passages which he likes or dislikes, (In the former class is that passage on Greek myths and their origin, which the hostile critics all selected as being spoken out of character by a pedlar) Hazlitt returns to more general considerations, the starkness of Wordsworth's subject-matter and style, combined with the subtlety of his sentiment. "His poems bear a distant resemblance to some of Rembrandt's landscapes, who, more than any other painter, created the medium through

which he saw nature."

On one important point Hazlitt finds himself obliged to part company with the poet. He can not admire the inhabitants of the country; they are "low company, and company besides that we do not like." In general they are gross and sensual, and if lacking these faults, the men of the Lakes balance the account with harsh selfishness and egotism. "Their minds become hard and cold, like the rocks which they cultivate."

The conclusion comes on a note of doubt. If the materials had been worth the power and sentiment expended on them, this would have been a monumental work, worthy of the author. As it is, to prophesy ultimate neglect for it would probably be presumption.

The next critic has no doubts whatever. (1)  
"This will never do," says Jeffrey, and goes on to show exactly why. In fact of this production he even looks back with regret to the simplicity "which

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(1) See Edinburgh Review Vol. 24 p.

Nov. 1814 &

Smith, Estimate p. 158.



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wavered so prettily, in the Lyrical Ballads, between silliness and pathos."

Not that the Edinburgh Review had neglected the poet during the intervening years. In 1808 he had been contrasted with Crabbe (q.v.), while in 1812 he was again mentioned along with his disciple, John Wilson.

Now in 1814 Wordsworth is given up as incurable, and Jeffrey promises that he will not be further harassed. No mention is made of the earlier appeal to public taste. Perhaps Jeffrey thought The Excursion such a change in kind that it would be irrelevant, but from the tone of the review this seems doubtful. In the present poem there are "occasional gleams of tenderness and beauty" for which Jeffrey is grateful. But, in his opinion, long seclusion and the desire for originality seem to have brought about a permanent estrangement between Wordsworth's taste and his genius. He is a sincere convert to his own system.

Jeffrey turns at last to the poem itself, "a tissue of moral and devotional ravings, in which innumerable changes are rung upon a few very simple and familiar ideas." Long words, long sentences, raptures and sublimities conceal this poverty of thought. But religious enthusiasm and Methodistical

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verbiage are dangerous elements in poetry. The poet's wilful attachment to low society is a further offence.

For a didactic poem, it suffers from an additional misfortune; its message is not quite clear apart from a few simple, and unoriginal ideas, namely, that a belief in Providence is very comforting, that there are indications of God's power and goodness in all his creation, and that therefore every part of it should be loved and revered. "If there be any deeper or more recondite doctrines in Mr. Wordsworth's book, we must confess that they have escaped us." And for the rest the poem is much too prolix.

The usual sarcastic summary follows. The pathos of the Deserted Cottage is, however, admired, in spite of its occasional mawkishness and "preposterous minuteness." The Third Book is "exceedingly dull and mystical," the Fourth, "an exposition of truisms....cloudy, wordy, and inconceivably prolix," and so on through the rest of the work.

A series of quotations substantiating these charges is given. The comment on one of them takes us right back to 1798 when Coleridge was being made a laughing stock by Southey: "If our readers can form the slightest guess at its meaning, we must give them credit for a sagacity to which we have no pretension."

"But there are merits proportionate," and

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a second series of quotations is devoted to passages of forcefulness or pathetic tenderness. Jeffrey chooses the Solitary's account of his own past life as "the most spirited and interesting part of the poem, and retells it with plentiful quotation. The story of Ellen is similarly gone through, and a number of lesser things, "gems in the desert," are also picked out.

But Jeffrey returns to an ungracious note to conclude: "Why should Mr. Wordsworth have made his hero a superannuated Pedlar?" He recalls the paltry associations suggested by such a man, the incongruity of making him the mouth-piece for such high-sounding and mystical pronouncements, the utter absence of any traits of his occupation in the actual pedlar of the poem. "A man who went about selling flannel and pocket-handkerchiefs in this lofty diction would soon frighten away all his customers." The absurdity is obvious, "but it is exactly of the same nature with that which infects the whole substance of the work - a puerile ambition of singularity engrafted on an unlucky predilection for truisms."

Wordsworth had asked Lamb to write a notice for the Quarterly Review. The notorious ill-treatment of the resultant article at the hands

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of the editor may be more fitly considered along with the rest of Gifford's dealings. It suffered a further misfortune, that, though dated October, it was in fact not published till December, after Jeffrey's damaging attack had appeared.

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Lamb begins by showing that, although a portion of a longer poem, the Excursion is complete in itself. The characters are briefly sketched, and then the reader's attention is drawn to the combination of didactic and narrative poetry, narrative "such as the lovers of Cowper and Goldsmith will recognize as something familiar and congenial to them. We might instance the Ruined Cottage and the Solitary's own story, in the first half of the work; and the second half as being almost a continued cluster of narration." But to Lamb the charm of the poem lies in the surrounding scenery: "We breathe in the fresh air, as we do while reading Walton's Complete Angler".

There follows Lamb's testimony to the Wordsworth touch: "To a mind constituted like that of Mr. Wordsworth, the stream, the torrent, and the stirring leaf - seem not merely to suggest associations of deity, but to be a kind of speaking communication with it. He walks through every forest as through some Dodona....To such a mind, we say - call it

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(1) See Quarterly Review Vol.12

Oct. 1814

& Smith, Estimate p.169.



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strength or weakness - if weakness, assuredly a fortunate one - the visible and audible things of creation present, not dim symbols, or curious emblems, ....but revelations and quick insights into the life within us, the pledge of immortality." The shell simile is quoted by way of example.

Wordsworth's religious outlook, a combination of faith, meditation, and "lonely communions with Nature", Lamb typically characterises as "an expanded and generous Quakerism." Its efficacy in consoling the broken-hearted is proved by quotations. (Lamb's opinion here contradicts Jeffrey's.) But in this connection, the "beautifully tender" tale of the ruined cottage might with advantage have "been postponed till the reader had been strengthened by some previous acquaintance with the author's theory." because "as we have ventured to lay the basis of the author's sentiments in a sort of Liberal Quakerism.... others may, with more plausibility, object to the appearance of a kind of Natural Methodism."

Book IV, Despondency Corrected, is awarded the palm "for moral grandeur; for wide scope of thought and a long train of lofty imagery; for tender personal appeals; and a versification....so involved in the poetry, that we can hardly mention it as a distinct excellence." The poet's romantic

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creed which sets "the imagination and the affections" above "the calculating understanding" is praised. Among various admiring quotations and references, including the passage on mythology and the story of Ellen, is a charmingly Elian note on the pastor: "With heaven above his head and the mouldering turf at his feet - standing betwixt life and death - he seems to maintain that spiritual relation which he bore to his living flock, in its undiminished strength even with their ashes."

In the remaining pages of the review, this doughty champion sets upon Wordsworth's critics: "A writer, who would be popular, must timidly coast the shore of prescribed sentiment and sympathy....He must not think or feel too deeply." In his admiration of nature he must be decorous, "or be content to be thought an enthusiast....If from living among simple mountaineers....he has detected or imagines that he has detected, through the cloudy medium of their unlettered discourse, thoughts and apprehensions not vulgar; traits of patience and constancy, love unwearied, and heroic endurance," then he will be despised by "the philanthropist who, conceiving of the peasantry of his country only as objects of a pecuniary sympathy, starts at finding them elevated to a level of humanity with himself." If from

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observation and introspection his ideas on childhood are "more reverential....than fall to the lot of ordinary observers....his verses shall be censured as infantile by those critics who confound poetry 'having children for its subject' with poetry that is childish."

Lamb points out that these accusations cannot so well be levelled against the Excursion, which demands a serious approach. "Those who hate the Paradise Lost will not love this poem. The steps of the great master are discernible in it; not in direct imitation or injurious parody, but in the following of the spirit, in free homage and generous subjection."

As an afterthought, comes the suggestion that if the term Pedlar irritate the too nice readers, they should "substitute silently the word Palmer or Pilgrim."

Another friendly, indeed sometimes ecstatic criticism appeared in the Eclectic Review, of which (1) the author was again James Montgomery. It will be observed that he follows the line of the Quarterly for April 1814, previously recorded, but to more profound

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(1) See Eclectic Review New series, Vol.3 p.13  
& Smith, Estimate p.175.

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issues and with more willingness. His first concern is with Wordsworth's attitude to nature, with which he can deeply sympathise, in spite of doubts about its religious propriety.

He asks how sin has found its way into such a lovely world, from communion with which all men can derive benefits. "but hearts, regenerated by the spirit of God, are alone capable of.....enjoying all the privileges of the human soul in its intercourse with the visible creation, as the mirrors of the power and perfections of Deity; or rather, as 'the hiding of his power'..... [Wordsworth] loves nature with a passion amounting almost to devotion; and he discovers throughout her works an omnipresent spirit, which so nearly resembles God in power and goodness, that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the reverence which he pays to it, from the homage due to the Supreme alone." Montgomery then shows how passages dependent on this mode of thought have brought on the poet nothing but scorn from superficial readers and self-constituted critics. In this examination he makes a strangely sensitive analysis of one aspect of Wordsworth's genius when he calls him a "poet of the most curious sensibility, who at once lives along the line of past existence, and can dwell on any part of it at pleasure." This passage on nature and the poet ends in the following passionate strain:-

"But he must have an eye purified to behold invisible realities, that surround him like the



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horses and chariots of fire guarding the prophet and his servant, - and an ear open to receive ineffable sounds, like the voice of the heavens when they are telling the glory of God, - who, with Mr. Wordsworth, in looking abroad in creation can listen to 'the still sad music of humanity', and perceive

A presence that disturbs him with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts...."

and the quotation is continued for another seven lines.

Again following the Quarterly, Montgomery turns to the Immortality Ode, but not merely to make an appreciative reference. In fact he gives the first analysis of this poem, tracing the thought step by step.

Coming finally to the Excursion itself, he first examines the doctrine there unfolded, and in doing so gives a complete and serious account of how to become a Wordsworthian. It is worth while comparing the reasoned ethical system that he finds with the handful of trite maxims which was all that Jeffrey could collect from the same poem. "Here we are taught," he says, "that communion with those forms of nature....which possess ineffable affinities to the mind of man, so softens, controls, and exalts his feelings, that....he, whose soul is thus harmonized within itself, cannot choose but seek objects of kindred love in natures resembling his own. Meanwhile, as the imagination is purified, and the affections are



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enlarged, the understanding is progressively enlightened, and the subject of this happy change, desiring that which is good looks for it every where and discovers it in every thing.... Moreover the soul possesses the power of self-regeneration, and at her own will, by her own activity, in the process of this mystic intercourse with nature, can raise herself from profligacy and wretchedness to virtue and repose." This last thesis, of course, Montgomery feels himself called upon to oppose in the name of Christianity. "Is it true?" he asks, "Is it all?.... Undoubtedly it is not all .... The love of Nature alone cannot ascend from earth to heaven, conducting us as by the steps of Jacob's ladder, to the love of God; nor can it descend from heaven to earth, leading us by similar gradations to the universal love of Man." If it could, Christ's incarnation and sacrifice would have been superfluous. Christ has not been made the corner-stone of Wordsworth's system. The pastor, speaking in character, adopts the Christian attitude, but he is not vitally connected to the central 'natural religion.'

Before passing to the literary aspect of the Excursion the critic expresses a keen desire for the publication of that other poem, the Prelude. He then has a cut at Jeffrey's style of summarising a narrative: "to detail a story, and exhibit the persons in such a manner as to cast unmerited

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ridicule both on the Author and his subject."

Montgomery has no such intention; he admires Wordsworth's peculiar powers too highly. "His descriptions, his figures, his similes, and his reflections, are all homogeneous and unique. He writes almost as if he had never read." Similarly, "he has invented a style more intellectual than that of any of his contemporaries, and in contradiction to his own theory (See Preface to Lyrical Ballads) as different from the most energetic language of ordinary minds in excitement, as the strain of his argument is elevated above vulgar reasoning.... The poet possesses the rare felicity of seizing the evanescent forms of thought, at any moment of their change....in phraseology so perfect that the words seem rather the thoughts themselves made palpable, than the symbol of thought. No difficulty of mastering his conceptions ever discourages him from attempting the full expression of them.... This may be the true secret of his superiority."

Montgomery considers the character of the Pedlar a daring but successful experiment. A quotation is given to show how impossible he is.

"But if this paragon have no prototype in individual man, it has perfect ideal existence, and therefore poetical reality."

After numerous quotations, including most of these selected by the previous critics, the review

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closes with a brief comparison of the villagers of Cowper, Crabbe, and Wordsworth.

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The Monthly Review takes a much more respectable line than in its previous squib. It begins with a sort of apology: "although we are aware that we shall be exposed to the charge of perverseness, we cannot persuade ourselves to retract [our previous] opinion." Not even praise could show so clearly the changed attitude of the public to Wordsworth. The Monthly and presumably the Edinburgh were conscious that theirs was no longer the majority verdict.

Taking a suggestion from Montgomery, the present reviewer compares Book Five with Crabbe's Parish Register. He takes exception to the Pedlar on the ground of incongruity - "we cannot place implicit faith in his existence" - but finds the other characters highly suitable. The poem in general is considered similar to the earlier productions, "only that it has much less of infantine simplicity, without gaining in nerve that which it has lost in prettiness of feature. Yet the stamp of a poetical mind is

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(1) See Monthly Review Vol. 76 Feb. 1815  
& Smith, Estimate p.182.

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throughout apparent." The poet's moral and intellectual qualities are ranked still higher. "In this last respect he does indeed resemble the great pattern of his imitation, Milton." Thereafter the reviewer returns to a more normal tone for the Monthly. Following the now fashionable mode, he gives an account of Wordsworth's pantheism, which has rendered many fine passages "unintelligible, useless, and even disgusting, by the suspicion of affectation which is engendered by this mania." Mysticism is not the way to religion.

Wordsworth's only claim to originality is a "certain peculiarity of diction." His sentiments and thoughts are trite. His greatness lies "in the bright but transient gleams of a powerful imagination," in his sensibility, and his attachment to the grand and the beautiful. (These "transient gleams" should be compared with Jeffrey's "occasional gleams". Most of this review derives from the Edinburgh.) The poet's peculiarities are attributed once more to his seclusion, and then to conclude come two, more original, notes. The first is a recognition of Wordsworth's utter deficiency in humour, and his failure when attempting to use it. The second is an observation on his blank verse - "one of the nearest approaches that has yet been made to the majesty of Milton."



It is a measure of the extent to which Wordsworth was now an accepted figure that The Excursion was highly praised by the reactionary British Review. "To this poem it is necessary that the reader should bring a portion of the same meditative disposition, innocent tastes, calm affections, reverential feelings, philosophic habits, which characterize the poet himself; for readers of another kind we greatly fear....that this poem 'will never do.'"<sup>(1)</sup> From this hint we may deduce one ulterior reason for this Tory paper's championship of the poet.

An interesting remark follows: "We have usually observed, that they who were most pleased with 'Lyrical Ballads,' were men with strong minds, and with a propensity to metaphysical studies; a presumption, this, that the simplicity of these ballads was not quite so infantile as has been often asserted." This was a point worth making, and very few of the poet's critics saw through the simplicity of his early work. Incidentally, the Review makes an attack on the classical code, quite unparalleled in its pages. As for Wordsworth "his page will live, when the breath of criticism shall have perished, and the laugh of insult shall have passed away: it will live, because it has a vital principle within it, like that which makes Shakespeare the darling of children and the companion of men." The Excursion "abounds with solemn, pious and elevated views of human nature and of providence."

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(1) See British Review Vol.6 p.50 Aug. 1815.

After having practically ignored the 1807 Poems, the British Critic returns to and indeed surpasses its earlier tone of praise. The form of the review is now much nearer to that of an Edinburgh article. It begins with a talk on the term 'meta-physical,' its application to the seventeenth-century poets, and its greater applicability to the Lake poets since "they have regarded everything naturally felt or imagined by man as being, so far, a proper subject for them; and they have used their abstract knowledge, not to provide playthings for the fancy, but to furnish a clue to the windings of the heart. The consequence is, that their poetry....may be often obscure, sometimes trivial, but it can never be unimpassioned.... Where it is admired, it will be beloved and idolized."

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Wordsworth is rebuked for not having clearly set forth the philosophic principles on which his poetry is based; and as token of gratitude the reviewer proceeds to make good the omission: Everything material and temporal can be associated with something spiritual and eternal, and the purpose of descriptive verse is to make such associations habitual to our minds. No one has so thoroughly fulfilled the lofty aim of nature poetry as Wordsworth who "has made it his daily and hourly business to spiritualize all sensible objects."

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(1) See British Critic New Series, Vol.3. May 1815  
& Smith, Estimate p.187.

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Of the poem itself the reviewer gives a very full analysis. He could "almost wish" that the Pedlar had been called something else for the sake of "the slaves of names" who cannot delight in his subtilities because of his profession. The emphasis of the review is placed on the religious aspect. Despondency Corrected.

The stories are characterised as being "sketched with all the truth of Crabbe's descriptive pencil, and with all the delicacy of Goldsmith's," and that of Ellen is selected as being the most interesting.

The features most likely to militate against the poem's success are next considered. The most fatal is the poet's intentness on his system, which leads him on the one hand to carelessness, prosaic lines, passages of wearisome length, and on the other to over-refinement in his association of spiritual things with natural objects. His transitions are too abrupt for the common reader, and so bring about an apparent obscurity. For the same reason the poet has moments of childishness and triviality. His doctrine that 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy' has often made him ridiculous in common eyes.

But the Excursion is exonerated from the worst and most prevalent sin of mysticism, which is

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"to rest satisfied with ourselves, if we have formed holy imaginations, and longed after heavenly things, though we have not embodied our feelings in active zeal and charity." However all the tendencies of the present poem "are strong in encouragement of real, industrious social virtue.... Who can estimate the advantage which would result to mankind, if all men endowed with Mr. Wordsworth's talents would devote them to the expression, by their life and writings, of sentiments pure and ennobling like these?"

Such were the views of contemporary critics of Wordsworth's monumental production. How do they compare with the verdict of a century and a quarter? At least there is one point of general agreement; by 1814 Wordsworth is accepted without question as a major poet.

For the rest, Jeffrey probably makes the best starting-point. With all his unfairness of attitude and all his readiness to poke sarcasms, Jeffrey had a degree of critical acumen and a rational outlook which keep his opinions healthy. To-day the honest critic, if he looks at The Excursion as a poem, and not as a social or psychological document, finds himself in the main in agreement with Jeffrey. As a great poem, The Excursion has not done. The moral and devotional purpose overweighs the poetry;



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the creed and the art are separate entities, and the lack of fusion between them is fatal. The charge of prolixity and tedium is irrefutable, and few modern readers are willing to look for "gems in the desert." The poem has its great moments, inset narratives and descriptions, mostly incorporated from the writings of an earlier period, to which Jeffrey's keen critical sense directed him, and in which we still recognise Wordsworth at his best. Jeffrey must be considered also as the first critic to observe a decrease in Wordsworth's poetic ability. He explicitly states the decline in pathetic power since the earlier poems, and brings the serious charge of poverty of thought. Coleridge's opinion here coincides with the critic's when he speaks of "an eddying instead of a progression of thought." Everywhere is implicit the suggestion that something is fundamentally wrong with a new wrongness, though Jeffrey never quite probes to the core of the weakness.

Modern criticism, however, must censure Jeffrey for his refusal anywhere to understand Wordsworth's attitude to Nature. Even the Monthly Review did that, although it thoroughly disapproved of it. Indeed some attempt at comprehension, if not appreciation, of the poet's philosophy of Nature is made by every other reviewer of The Excursion. As we have

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shown, Montgomery gives the most sensitive and penetrating analysis of this aspect of the poet's genius; neither Lamb, as his review now stands, nor Hazlitt equals him in exposition of this topic, though perhaps surpassing him in the more subtle art of emotional appreciation. The more conventional British Critic contents itself with extracting for praise almost the identical truisms that Jeffrey had castigated.

This emphasis on the philosophical tendency of the poem marks a fundamental change of accent on the part of the reviews. Their former pre-occupation with the problem of diction was due to Wordsworth's own explicit interest in it. By issuing an admittedly didactic poem, he certainly helped to shift the interest from his manner to his matter. But already the interest had begun to shift of its own accord. The Quarterly, as has been noted, had indicated the new outlook before The Excursion had appeared. The spontaneity of the critics in elevating him from a poet to a prophet is further suggested by two recurrent notes in the reviews. The first is the desire for the publication of the purely didactic poem at whose existence Wordsworth hinted. The second is the attention now paid to such poems as the Immortality Ode and Tintern Abbey. Montgomery, it will be observed, derives his version of the Wordsworthian creed almost entirely outwith the bounds of The Excursion.

Taken with the increased respect shown to the poet, this new attitude indicates how far Wordsworth had succeeded in his aim of creating a new taste. He is no longer a revolutionary theorist on the question of diction; he is a poet who has awakened new sensibilities in the public mind.

The poet's philosophy, however, carried some dangerous implications. From the religious point of view, it seemed almost heathen, a worshipping of God's creatures rather than the Creator. The poet had in fact expressed a preference for being in certain circumstances a Pagan suckled in a creed outworn, although apparently no critic took him to task for that. Wordsworth of course had his own answer to the charge, but the British Critic answered it for him by

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(1) See the famous letter to Mrs. Clarkson.

It is unnecessary to reopen the question of the poet's religious beliefs here. I think the revisions of The Prelude put it beyond doubt that in 1805 he was a pantheist, and changed later to a panentheist of the school of Jeremy Taylor, something rather more respectable. The studied ambiguity of the above mentioned letter is worth remark:- "Whence does she [Mrs. Clarkson's friend] gather that the author of The Excursion looks upon Nature and God as the same?"

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pointing to the elevating effect of the whole, the exhortation to good works. On the other hand, the sociological tendencies of The Excursion were similarly, if less obviously, disturbing. Lamb disclosed the source of anxiety here. If Wordsworth, he says, from living as an equal among simple hill-folk comes to detect in them a variety of noble thoughts and emotions, "he will be deemed a man of perverted genius by the philanthropist who, conceiving of the peasantry of his country only as objects of pecuniary sympathy, starts at finding them elevated to a level of humanity with himself." In other words, the poet, perhaps unconsciously, still inclined to the Left wing. Where before he had been a political leveller, he was now a moral leveller, an even more dangerous kind of Socialist. Out of this a strange situation arises. The Tory papers without exception praise The Excursion while the Whigs appear to be affected by a certain indefinable irritation, even the Radical Hazlitt expressing his strong objection to mixing in low company. But the conflict is never overt as it had once been, and only Lamb gives us the clue to the real issues. But he still leaves us with the question unsolved, why should the Liberals take offense more quickly than the thorough-going Conservatives?

On the purely literary side, there is less



of interest in the criticisms. Lamb and Jeffrey pick on the outstanding beauties and the rest agree. Over the impossible Pedlar, the hostile critics are censorious and the rest apologetic. To the actual quality of the style Jeffrey remains deliberately blind, neither showing the change since 1807, nor giving any indication of the merits of what he finds admirable now. He points to the new faults accurately but scarcely makes it explicit that they are new, although such phrases as "long words, long sentences" and "mystical verbiage" imply some considerable change. Almost all the rest feel and communicate the stark massive dignity of Wordsworth's blank verse at its best and the tedious pedestrianism of it at its worst.

No useful purpose would be served by following Wordsworth's fortunes further in detail. Their tendency is obvious. In 1798 the poet was unknown and abused by the critics almost without exception. In 1807 a change had come about; Wordsworth was a force to be reckoned with; Lyrical Ballads had been successful; therefore the poet received much publicity, even if it was hostile. By 1814 Wordsworth was beginning to reap his harvest. In 1807 the Eclectic's was the only Wordsworthian criticism, and it could hardly be called flattering. In 1814 the same paper

inconsistent  
with previous  
act of records

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was ecstatically in sympathy with the poet. The good work was continued with the White Doe. Thereafter a distinct change of tone is noticeable; obviously the reviewer has been changed. One is led to the conclusion that the Eclectic had run rather ahead of its time and that the editors had begun to realise it. This is a matter quite apart from the praise or blame given to the poem under review; it is a question of attitude.

But the Eclectic was not alone. Indeed the Quarterly Review had preceded it, though less sympathetically, and nothing could have been more fortunate than allowing Lamb to review The Excursion. This was personal prejudice indeed, acting for instead of against Wordsworth. Respecting the poet's 1815 productions, the Quarterly was less partial but by no means unfriendly. Taking up the question of diction from the 1815 Preface, it reaches Coleridge's conclusion two years before he did:- "If the language of low life be purified from what we should call its real defects, it will differ only in copiousness from the language of high life".

The British Critic, thanks to Wrangham, had been Wordsworth's earliest friend, and it had by now adopted a tone of open adulation, which it long maintained. Unfortunately its reviews were lacking in subtlety and discrimination.

Of the old enemies, only the Edinburgh

and the Monthly remained in continued hostility. Jeffrey had not honestly faced up to the problem of Wordsworth's altered diction, although he did so later, nor to the challenge he had made, although he might have pointed out that the 1807 volumes did not run to even a second edition. His new promise of silence was broken for the White Doe, but thereafter kept till 1822. The Monthly less discriminating, and becoming more and more an echo of the Edinburgh, and even of itself, maintained a regular fire, until at last the River Duddon volume was hailed as an improvement. That is to say, it began to admire Wordsworth when his originality was decidedly on the wane and after the public had decided to accept him.

An interesting note begins to be heard in the favourable reviews after this date. It is a complaint, derived from Coleridge's Biographia, against unfavourable reviews, especially the unfair selection of quotations to present the poet in a ridiculous and distorted light.

Another division of the reviews than for and against might be usefully made: romantic and anti-romantic, subjectively appreciating and objectively judging. The Eclectic, Hazlitt's, and Lamb's reviews alone can be classed as the former. Even the new periodicals, the Quarterly in general, and the Edinburgh, show themselves more closely akin to

the old-fashioned monthlies which they were supplanting in being anti-romantic.

In 1817 there appeared a new-comer, which later took to itself the credit of having discovered Wordsworth, Blackwood's Magazine. This was rather an unjustifiable claim, but the relations between Wordsworth and that paper will be examined with more propriety at a later point.



### CHAPTER THE THIRD

#### "THE COMPANY OF LAKE POETS".

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We must now retrace our steps somewhat to observe the reactions of the press to the other members of the Lake school. Of the names linked with Wordsworth's, the most outstanding to his contemporaries, at least as late as 1807, was Southey's. It is not difficult to see why. He made a reputation for himself before the others; he wrote long poems in an age that took its long poems seriously; he was less bizarre, nearer the norm than the others; and he was prolific. Coleridge's fame was adversely affected by the scattered and infrequent nature of his publications; Wordsworth was less easily understood and more eccentric than Southey in his emotional attitudes.

To follow the earliest fortunes of Southey and Coleridge carries us back to that distant era before the founding of the Edinburgh. The reviews of their early works, together with those of the Lyrical Ballads already noted, should be considered as giving an abstract of the older criticism, and may be contrasted with the later styles.

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Joan of Arc was lucky in its critics. The Whig press took it up quickly and did it ample justice.

In the opinion of the Analytical Review, (1)  
the theme is suitable for an epic, even though the English are the villains of the piece. Like Southey, the reviewer sets justice above patriotism. The moral lesson, directed against all tyranny, is a salutary one. Some flaws are pointed out. There are redundancies; some anachronism appears in the philosophical opinions; and allegory does not successfully supply the place of epic machinery. But the poem breathes a "noble spirit of freedom" and the poet displays a fertile fancy, sufficient learning, and, it is worth noticing, "correct and elegant taste in versification".

Southey was evidently persona grata with the Critical Review. Before long he was to become a (2)  
regular contributor, and as such damn the Lyrical Ballads. In the meantime he had the good fortune to come before it while it was in an ecstasy of Whiggism. This was only a temporary aberration which came to an end when Alexander Hamilton was replaced by Samuel Hamilton as publisher in the year 1798-9. Thereafter the Critical remained most staunchly Tory.

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(1) See Analytical Review Vol.23 p.170  
Feb. 1796.

(2) See Critical Review Vol.16 p.191 Feb.1796  
Vol.17 p.182 June 1796

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Southey's epic was thought worthy of two full-length articles. Like the previous critic, this reviewer welcomes his choice of a "subject well suited to a sublime species of poetry." He also sets up Southey's straw man, the questionable patriotism of the subject, and allows Southey to knock it down again with a quotation from the preface. The critic agrees with the poet's contention that epic heroes are usually dull and unheroic, if not positively villainous. In the second article he asks if the subject is a prudent choice in contemporary circumstances, and comes to the conclusion that "the cause of truth [is] of higher importance than any particular interest."

The most serious fault that the critic can find is ironically enough the too free use of poetic diction. "Poetry has a language peculiar to itself," and transposition is a permissible poetic device. "But we would advise him [Southey] and Mr. Coleridge, to introduce this practice with prudence, and but sparingly." The next complaint was to become more customary, and its suggestion of an unsuccessful experiment is probably the earliest of the many that this brotherhood were to hear. The reviewer points out the number of prosaic lines, so prosaic as to be

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sometimes unmetrical. These can hardly be unintentional, but if the poets have adopted this practice on the principle of avoiding monotony, they are leading themselves into a serious error.

Taking the poem as a whole, the reviewer concludes that Southey's powers are "very superior, and capable, we doubt not, of producing a poem that will place him in the first class of English poets."

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The Monthly Review seemed rather pleased at (1)  
the thought that Joan would certainly offend national sympathies. It did not try to minimise the faults due to hastiness and exuberance, but pointed to the evident powers of the author which "promise a rich harvest of future excellence; conceptions more lofty and daring, sentiments more commanding and language more energetic....will not readily be found." The general tone of the poem of course pleases the critic; it is "uniformly noble, liberal, enlightened, and breathing the purest spirit of general benevolence and regard to the rights and claims of human kind."

A very lukewarm notice appeared in the  
British Critic. No mention was made of politics, but (2)  
the faint blame rather outweighed the faint praise.

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(1) See Monthly Review Vol.19 p.361 Apr. 1796

(2) See British Critic Vol.8 p.393 Oct. 1796



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Joan of Arc was too obvious an opportunity for the Anti-Jacobin Review to miss, although the notice was delayed till the second edition was issued, and the epic was coupled with the second volume of Southey's Poems. (1)

Naturally the critic has no good word for Southey's choice of subject. If the theme strikes the poet himself as unpatriotic, "why treat it at all? ...Why, at this crisis more especially, represent the English as continually routed and disgraced in their conflicts with the French? Is there not a squint of malignity - a treacherous allusion in such a picture? ...Alas! the Jacobin principles that directed the writer's choice are but too notorious." The critic also dislikes a merely historical plot, and protests against the absence of machinery. But some honest praise is given to the characters - "we have no scruple in preferring them to the secondary characters of Virgil," - particularly ~~to~~ Joan herself. The writer also approves of the poet's descriptive style, but not of those passages where the English soldiers mete out the horrors of war so liberally, or where the Maid expresses the sentiments of Tom Paine.

The poems are dismissed briefly with a word of praise for the ballads and of condemnation for the English Eclogues.

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(1) See Anti-Jacobin Review Vol.3 p.120 Jun 1799

In the years between Joan and Thalaba, the Monthly Review achieved a complete volte-face towards Southey. As his politics became more normal and his verse more heterodox, this paper became more hostile.

Southey's first volume of poems, issued in (1) 1797, is still acceptable, although the poet is warned to show more deference to the public and more seriousness towards his verse. The critic is obviously pleased with Southey's choice of revolutionary themes - the slave trade and Botany Bay. Such poems are addressed from one feeling heart to another. But "the joyous affections do not appear to be those that are most congenial to the writer's mind," and the reviewer dislikes the sombre hue of the whole production.

In 1800 Southey issued a second volume, and the storm broke. The charge of writing on a false (2) system was now formally made. "Seduced by the brilliant but dangerous eccentricities of Cowper.... Mr. Southey has attempted to make the Muse descend a step lower, and has, in reality, brought her to the level of prose." It will be noticed that this is

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- (1) See Monthly Review Vol.22 p.297 Mar. 1797  
(2) See ibidem Vol.31 p.261 Mar. 1800

It seems almost certain on internal evidence that these reviews were written by Jeffrey. See later under Thalaba.

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after the date of Lyrical Ballads although before that of Wordsworth's Preface. The reviewer tries to prove his point by printing various verses as prose and asking sweetly, "Is this poetry, gentle reader?"

Further cause for displeasure is found in the Poet's fondness for antique models. "While Bunyan continues to be one of Mr. Southey's classics, we must not expect strains very superior to these."

Even Southey's faithfulness to Radical subjects does not save him. After quoting the Sailor in the Slave Trade the review continues, "Jasper is a production in a similar strain, which we would recommend to the Cheap Repository; since the moral is excellent and the versification is well adapted to the taste of the lower classes of society."

Joan had been mainly a peg on which to hang revolutionary disquisitions. By 1802 Southey had forgotten, and was most eager that the public should forget his Jacobinical ardour. Thalaba was a serious bid for poetical fame; it had no ulterior purpose. Two features were of outstanding novelty, the strange tale, and the stranger free verse; neither were of an easily acceptable kind.

The British Critic was so early in the field that the reviewer had obviously done nothing more than read the preface and a few pages of the  
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(1) See British Critic Vol. 18 p. 309 Sep. 1801.

verse, fling the book down in disgust, and damn the author out of hand:- "The writer of this wretched stuff has the vanity to censure the approved verse of his country; this inharmonious stuff - which, were not the lines divided by the printer, no living creature would suspect to be even intended for verse ....The work may be characterized in five words, 'Tale of Terror, run mad.'"

It has already been observed how Jeffrey, in the very first number of his Review took Thalaba as the text of his discourse on the Lake Poets. These preliminary remarks should be kept in mind as leading up to the following detailed consideration of the poem itself. In the first place Jeffrey dislikes the irregular verse, mentioning the difficulties caused by a constantly changing metre. The subject, too, is ill-chosen and the narrative as disorderly as the verse. "Supernatural beings, though easily enough raised, are known to be very troublesome in the

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(1) See Chap. II

& Edinburgh Review Vol.I p.63

Oct. 1802.



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management." His (Southey's) sorcerers are inconsistent and undignified, and lead him into various awkward and bathetic situations. The actual story is a tissue of borrowed scraps, as Southey's notes show. "His poem is little else than his common-place book versified."

Yet the poem contains many passages that display beauty and force and a certain richness of poetical conception. Jeffrey refers particularly to the homely picture of Thalaba's upbringing and his girl-love, Oneiza. Various quotations are given to show the picturesque quality of the descriptions.

In his general summing up Jeffrey shows his usual acuteness:- "[Southey possesses] an amiable mind, a cultivated fancy, and a perverted taste. His genius seems naturally to delight in the representations of domestic virtues and pleasures, and the brilliant delineation of external nature....but he seems to want vigour for the loftier flights of poetry." If only Southey would have believed this! His voluminous epics are dead to-day, and a handful of domestic poems is all that has kept its place. The perversion of his taste Jeffrey attributes to his faithfulness to "that school, in which he has greater talents than any of his associates." Greater faithfulness might have redeemed him.

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Jeffrey was also able to criticise the poem in the Monthly Review, in an article actually written, (1) although not published, before the foundation of his own paper. He opens this attack with a barrage of adjectives - "irregular and splendid, improbable and interesting, and at once extravagant and elaborate." The basic fault, on which he lays most emphasis this time, is the poem's lack of connexion. It is a medley of kinds, being lyric, drama, and epic by turns. The manners are a mixture of eastern and western. Most mixed of all is the verse. He indicates as one of the most uniform qualities of the poem its gloominess. The innocent and the guilty are alike miserable, but as a result of the extravagant story, the disasters "can scarcely produce any of the moral effects of tragic representation, and seem to be a gratuitous sacrifice to the author's predilection for sorrow."

Now as this same accusation had been levelled at Southey a few years earlier in the two very dogmatic notices already mentioned, one may suspect that there Jeffrey had tried his prentice hand on the poet. The most intangible evidence of style also favours this suggestion, but it is of course impossible without some external pointer to say definitely

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(1) See Monthly Review Vol.39 p.240 Nov. 1802  
& Cockburn, Life of Jeffrey Vol.1 p.128

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that Jeffrey did write these earlier articles.

The conclusion of the present one is typical of the critic. He thinks the versification very faulty; it is presumptuous of a young author to come forward and recommend such a mongrel metre. It is too late in the history of literature to introduce a new style of versifying. If variety is his plea, the other was varied enough for Milton and Shakespeare.

The Critical Review, although now die-hard (1) Tory, remained loyal to its contributor. It is not a uniformly flattering notice, but the only real grumble Southey could have against it would be at the lateness of its appearance. It was not published till more than a year after the others. But then the reviewer had gone to the trouble of reading the poem twice.

He does not really like the verse-form. He admits later that it is unnecessarily varied, but at first he rather prettily avoids direct reproof: "The verse itself seems to have the wildness and the power of incantation." The general verdict on the story is that "so novel a romance it is difficult to praise or to blame too much." The first impression made on the reader is strong though confusing, but on a second perusal the design becomes clearer, and the poem will be frequently interrupted, to give vent to interjections of applause, and to break loose into thrilling

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(1) See Critical Review Vol.39 p.369 Dec. 1803.

exultations of delight." The critic at his second reading must have been rather an amusing spectacle.

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We need not follow him into the arid region of detailed criticism, but two points may be noted. Book One, he thinks, should be deleted, as "it is not pleasant to become acquainted with the hero in his childhood." If this opinion is not mere contrariness, it shows how much the general attitude towards childhood and the place of children in literature have changed in the years between, for example, Jane and Ann Taylor's Original Poems for Infant Minds and Milne's Winnie the Pooh. Secondly a spell uttered in Book IX "is more than painted; it is created! it breathes! it lives!" This masterpiece is quoted and the reviewer breaks out again: "Greeks! Latins! come with your Pythonesses! Where is there a description like this? Edinburgh reviewers, tamers of genius, come and vaunt couplets and habitual metres, and show us an effect like this! Ghost of Boileau, scowl! we will enjoy." Even although the reviewer was deliberately puffing a fellow-contributor, the significance of this outburst remains. In the year of grace 1803 the Critical Review publicly declared the independence of poetry, the right of a piece of literature to shape the laws of its own being. The sincerity of this belief may be questioned, its permanence will be examined.

The poems that followed Thalaba were closely akin to it. They also contained large indigestible lumps of heathen mythology, told rambling



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incoherent stories and dragged on to great lengths. In other words, Southey had now found what he conceived to be his style. A general comparison of the various fortunes of Joan and of the later epics at the reviewers' hands will be made when the other two have been dealt with, as they are so similar that they confronted the critics with few new problems.

It is quite clear that Thalaba had made a name for its author, for with the publication of Madoc came one unfailing sign of a writer's "arrival", a sudden increase in the number of notices it received. In fact as early as October, 1805, quite a batch of reviews appeared.

Jeffrey had changed as little as the poet, (1) and remained hostile. He allows Southey talent, but two things stand between him and greatness. In the first place, he is fired by an "undisciplined and revolutionary ambition" which makes him avoid the established modes of poetry and attempt the creation of a new type. With a stroke of characteristic but irritating dogmatism Jeffrey slams the door in the face of all literary evolution: "In matters of taste ....we conceive that there are no discoveries to be made, any more than in matters of morality. The end of poetry is to please; and men cannot be mistaken as

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(1) See Edinburgh Review Vol.7 p.1 Oct. 1805.

to what has actually given them pleasure."

Southey's second vice is facility. "As he has always plenty of good words, he never pauses to look for exquisite ones." Colloquial blank verse will be the ruin of him. Three charges are substantiated against Southey's epic. It is lacking in distinguishable characters, and consequently in reality, it is fundamentally incongruous, and the language is unsatisfactory.

In more gracious moods he draws attention to the melodiousness of the best verse, the exact and delicate descriptions of nature, and the success of the costume. A word of praise is also given to the lovely work of the Ballantyne press.

The Monthly Review again coincides with the Edinburgh. Staunch objection is made to Southey's deliberate rejection of Aristotle's rules. Yet, says the reviewer, he has kept one of them only too well; the poem plunges too far in medias res with consequent clumsiness and loss of interest.

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(1) See Monthly Review Vol.48 p.114

Oct. 1805.

Criticism of various small points follows. The repulsive names may be historically correct, but they are poetically defenceless. The poem is written in the wrong key: "The dull tenor of mediocrity.... is totally unsuitable to heroic poetry."

The final verdict runs:- "To us there appears a thorough perversion of taste in the conception and execution of the whole, and we are disgusted with the tameness of the verse, the vulgarity of the thoughts, and the barbarity of the manners."

Southey apparently knew somebody on the European Magazine at this time. The resultant notice (1) is flattery rather than criticism, but it is certainly a counterblast to the Edinburgh. Indeed so point-counter-point are the contradictions that it is difficult not to believe that the one was written in reply to the other, although the date of publication makes this seem impossible. Speaking of Southey himself, it begins in high style: "Those who bear in mind the productions of his younger age, will acknowledge that Mr. Southey's name has long been dear to literature, and will see, in his poem *Madoc*, a better fruit than even those blossoms promised

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(1) See European Magazine Vol.48 p.279 Oct. 1805

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which his early genius displayed." A running criticism follows, in which Jeffrey's objections are duly answered.

Two pointers suggest that the writer had personal contact with the poet. The first runs thus: "Whenever there is an opportunity for the display of domestic feelings Mr Southey has seized it with a happiness that shows how entirely he possesses, and understands, and values them. Happy must those be who are the objects of them in real life." Then at the end of the review comes a reference to the unwritten History of Portugal: "When this [work] shall be accomplished, he will have founded a name which in present and in future times will be looked up to with reverence; and those who may be connected to him by blood or descent may exclaim with a laudable pride - this man is my relative, the favourite of the Muses was my ancestor!" There is a strange fulsome note about these sentences that one does not quite know how to take.

Another newcomer was the Imperial Review, (1) which also gave a favourable account of Madoc, but in a more reasonable manner. The critic likes the poem but can foresee objections to it. However, "future ages, we are confident, will do ample justice to the merits of the author." This was not meant to be ambiguous. The reviewer actually approves of the attribution of Columbus's adventures to a Briton,  
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(1) See Imperial Review Vol.5 p.416 & 465  
Oct. & Nov. 1805



suggesting that it is done "for purposes which cannot escape the notice, and probably the admiration of the intelligent reader," namely to give the epic the correct patriotic touch. Considered from the moral point of view, the poem is "just and benovelent beyond anything that could be expected of human nature, even at the present enlightened period of society." Here as elsewhere it is evident that the Imperial Review rather liked the sentimental. One notices the loving attention which it devotes to every appearance of "little Hoel". The review ends with a consideration of the general conduct of the poem. Great exception is taken to the language: "The style, in many places, is trailing, flat and uninteresting, - deficient both in strength and animation....An apparent, not to say affected, simplicity of diction pervades the whole work. Sometimes the language is uncommonly prosaic... And what lessens its merits, in our estimation, may possibly, in [Southey's], be a recommendation." Given a more elevated style, "Madoc would hardly yield to Paradise Lost. As it stands, it is certainly the second heroic production on the English language."

It is somewhat sad to find that in its notice of Madoc, the Critical Review repeals its Declaration of the Poet's Freedom. Southey both in life and in literature, had an irritating habit of self-righteousness. This time he succeeded in thoroughly rousing the reviewer. First the proem

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(1) See Critical Review 3rd. Ser. Vol. 7 p. 72  
Jan. 1806

"Come, for ye know me, I am he who sang....etc."

annoys him. It is a "cheat upon the tax-office, which is by these means robbed of a duty, which would otherwise have been paid for a similar newspaper-puff."

It is fatally like the rhyming advertisement for a quack medicine.

A second source of the critic's anger is to be found in Southey's Preface. The former leads up to the refutation of that preface by a disquisition on the revolution in poetry: "At the precise period when rebellion was abroad among the people,...she also reared her head among the poets, many of whom threw off the fetters of measure and rhyme, and issued a manifesto, which declared the laws of verse, as they had hitherto existed, to be vile impositions, degrading oppressions, barbarous manacles on the energies of the mind. A sort of club was instituted, in which mutual honours were bestowed, and very strong resolutions were passed against those, who persisted in shutting their eyes against the new light."

Lucian's dictum, used as a motto for Thalaba, that Poetry is free, and subject to no law but the will of the poet, is shown to mean merely that the poet is free to invent his subject-matter, and the critic refuses the poet any right to freedom from the rules

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of poetics, let alone the right to free verse. Southey has taken the liberty of rejecting "the degraded title of epic." "There is something very flippant in all this. The author prejudices the reader against him....We are not to try this poem by the common rules of our court....we are simply to observe whether it be adapted to the purposes of poetry." But to judge poetry in this way is to turn one's back on all progress and civilisation. The rules of poetry are derived from the accumulated wisdom of centuries, and to depart from them is to start again at the rude beginnings of poetry.

A similar dislike is expressed for Southey's eccentric choice of subject. "The adventures of Madoc are certainly a fairy tale.... Mr. Southey.... might have done that justice to the memory of Columbus, which America has withheld,....instead of giving splendour to the adventures of a second Sinbad the Sailor."

This carping, however, falls to silence before the actual poem. "Madoc is a noble effort of genius." Some trifling details are criticised, and an apology is given for not quoting any beauties, "as every reader of taste who reads the poem, (and

what reader of taste will not read it?) will be forcibly struck with them."

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Personal prejudice again acted in favour of Southey when his friend and employer, Dr. Aikin, founded the Annual Review. It was not until the issue of Madoc that Aikin had an opportunity of noticing the poet's work, which he now did most enthusiastically, hailing Madoc as "an heir of immortality....the best epic poem...since the Paradise Lost." and subsequently contradicting most of the objections made by the Critical. For example, he thinks the introduction tasteful and appropriate.

(1)

A book-by-book summary is given, with comments, not always favourable. A wonderful comparison is made between Southey's epic and some earlier ones, and it is concluded that "the fable of Madoc has more importance, more majesty, and less wholeness than that of the Odyssey, and Aenid or the

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(1) See Annual Review Vol.4 p.604 1806.



Lusiad."

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An extraordinary plea is made for the restoration of epic machinery. God versus the heathen idols. The favourable coincidences are "too providential for an unseen providence. Where a religious man would discover the hand of his god, the poet should exhibit it....We do not like poetical atheism."

A comment on the style, "the level middle manner." implies a rather neat defence of Southey's past adventures: "We prefer the incoherent diction of Thalaba to this uniform propriety, this classical purity, this tasteful Attic simplicity. The author has been tamed by his critics, and Pegasus now moves in harness."

The British Critic took the trouble of read- (1)  
ing the poem this time; and so the notice was not published for more than a year after the poem. Although the general verdict is unfavourable, Southey is now regarded of sufficient importance to occupy two articles. The first is a piecemeal criticism of the poem, in which this critic disagrees at some point with each of the others. He likes the opening in medias res and the descriptions, but calls the

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(1) See British Critic Vol.28 p.395 & 486  
Oct. & Nov. 1806.

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dialogue "poetry in its dotage." He pokes fun at "Columbus (Mr. S. calls him Madoc)" and the weird names. The theme does not strike him as being super-humanly noble, in fact the Christianising of the Aztecs wholesale is not to him morally acceptable. One vital point, however, he does make. Southey's judgment and taste are not equal to his industry. He selects the mean and the ridiculous as readily, and spends his powers on them as energetically as on the valuable.

The second article, after reproving Southey's flippant use of Scripture language and his touches of Jacobinism, passes to a consideration of the poem as a whole. The critic finds it artistically defective on several counts. It is incredible, and yet it is lacking in novelty. There are various anachronisms in the story. The characters are not a success, Madoc being too perfect and inhuman, the rest tame and inglorious. Some merit, it is however allowed, the poet can claim. He has an unrivalled command and fluency of language, and he looks on scenery with a poetic eye. A final wish discloses the deep root of the British Critic's antagonism. The

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(i) A habit to which Southey was addicted, though calling similar tricks in, say, Byron blasphemous.

reviewer hopes that Southey will soon take up a great subject from British history, such as King Arthur, to redeem the traitorousness of Joan of Arc.

The Curse of Kehama appeared in 1810. It was more like Thalaba than Madoc. The verse was again free but with rhyme, and there was a return to mythology - this time Hinduism - as the mainspring of the poem.

Jeffrey began by stating solemnly his constant objection to the Lakists: "We admire the genius of Mr. Southey; we reverence the lofty principles, and we love the tenderness of heart, that are visible in all his productions. But we are heartily provoked at his conceit and bad taste, and quite wearied out with the perversity of his manifold affectations."

(1)

A novel comparison is made between Southey's earlier epics and some other poems. In fifteen years Joan of Arc has run to three editions, Thalaba to two, and Madoc to one; whereas poems like Montgomery's Wanderer of Switzerland have gone through six editions and the Farmer's Boy more than ten. Judging by sales

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(i) See Edinburgh Review Vol.17 p.429 Feb.1811.

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therefore, Southey grows less popular, and the reason lies in his perverse taste. In this notice Jeffrey aims at counteracting this undue neglect from which the poet suffers. "This is kind I offer," but Southey can hardly have been delighted at Jeffrey's modus operandi. He starts off by remarking that Southey's faults are peculiarly glaring and peculiarly offensive. They can be summed up in one word, childishness. "All his interesting personages lisp like sucklings; and his unamiable ones are, as nearly as possible, such sort of monsters as nurses imagine to frighten naughty boys into obedience." Southey suffers also from an excessive love of his own genius.

Having thus rescued Southey from neglect, the critic goes on to tear Kehama limb from limb. We need not observe the vivisection in detail. The objections are not new nor is the praise, which is reserved for the best descriptive, and the most human passages. An idyllic canto, in which the heroine's father finds a brief heaven upon earth, is especially commended.

Jeffrey's general verdict on the poem is that it "possesses the interest of a fairy tale for children, and not an Epic poem for men.... being so utterly extravagant as to lose the power even of producing astonishment." The diction is copious and varied, but always diffuse, and often affected. Irregularity of metre can be justified only by an exquisite propriety of diction; Southey's is not so



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justified. So much time has been spent on him because he has a real gift for description and tenderness, which is almost entirely obscured by these various affectations of matter and manner.

By this date the Quarterly Review had come into being, with Southey as a very active member of the staff. It was only natural therefore that this periodical should set the poem in the best possible light, and no less important a writer than Walter Scott was entrusted with the task.

The review begins with a contrast between the romantic and classical creeds, the poets versus the critics, which Scott could make with authority. The poets claim that inspiration means freedom from the rules. They have the right to choose their own ground, to experiment on taste and on principles "as change of times appears to demand....The object of poetry is pleasure; and if the old tract has ceased to guide us towards it, fresh avenues must be opened." To all of this the critics reply that the general rules, even when strictly kept, allow plenty of variety. "It does not become the poet to assume the licence of framing his effusions according to the fantastic dictates of his own imagination." Old subjects are susceptible of new polish and grace.

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(i) See Quarterly Review Vol.5 p.41 Feb.1811.

It is obvious, however, that the path to epic poetry by way of the rules is impassably blocked. The laws of poetry are to be derived only from "an accurate consideration of the springs and movements of the human heart."

Coming to the poem itself, Scott mentions its wildness as a virtue, the reader's attention being drawn to Southey's abundant imagination and the "exuberancy" of his writing. The poem is instructive too, teaching us about the little-known mythology of the Hindus. The main emphasis, however, is placed on the moral quality of the tale. "Our highest tribute of praise is due to Mr. Southey as a poet and as a man. In whatever degree the cause of virtue and of morals (and we must be blind indeed not to discover his uniform exertions on their side) has been indebted to him heretofore, it has now to acknowledge far more splendid services." The unswerving goodness of the heroine is the mainspring of the action.

Because of its high moral and imaginative qualities, this poem "has certainly advanced far towards perfection in one of the chief objects of poetry - the elevation of the human mind.... Poetry, indeed, cannot create a soil for virtue to take root in; but whenever it appears in its loftier character, it seldom fails to invigorate and enrich that in which it is already implanted." This is a new note in critical writing which we shall trace becoming stronger and stronger. It is typical of Scott's warm-heartedness

that it should be introduced by him in this connection.

The Critical Review had now made up its (i)  
mind to dislike Southey. A mocking tone is adopted,  
somewhat similar to Jeffrey's, but not free from  
vulgarity: "Now-a-days, your poet makes nothing at  
all of knocking his hero on the head in the first  
stanza, and afterwards frightening his readers out of  
their senses with the actions of his ghost or Eidolon;  
which rants, and raves, and ravishes, and murders, with  
all the ease imaginable, notwithstanding its loss of  
flesh and blood, like any living christian."

In fairness one must set against this the  
comment on the earthly paradise which had already  
drawn Jeffrey's praise: "The whole of the canto into  
which we are now entered, we have read over and over  
again with great delight. The description of natural  
scenery which it contains, though extremely beautiful,  
forms the least of its merit; we are raised in it to  
the contemplation of moral excellence and pure and  
exalted piety, never so attractive as when conveyed to  
our minds in the true language of piety animated with  
the very feelings which it endeavours to represent."

The judgment on the poem as a whole is  
rather neat and very just: "One might as well hold

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(i) See Critical Review 3rd. Ser. Vol.22 p.225

a farthing candle to the sun, as think of placing Homer or Shakspeare, or Milton or Dante, by the side of it. But it is the false blaze of enchantment, not the steady radiance of truth and nature; and if you gain courage to look at it a second or a third time, the magic has lost its power, and you only wonder what it was that dazzled you."

The contributor to the Monthly Review had evidently studied Jeffrey's writings carefully once more. Indeed the review is rather like a parody of that author. Some reply is made to the Quarterly Review in passing.

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The notice begins in a high style of indignation: "We are, indeed, bound now to make a firm stand for the purity of our poetic taste against this last and most desperate assault....If this poem were to be tolerated, all things after it may demand impunity; and it will be vain to contend hereafter for any one established rule of poetry."

The narrative is retold quite in the flippant style of the Edinburgh. Objection is taken to the format: "Every page is so printed as to wear the appearance of an Epitaph....in a manner ingeniously emblematical of its speedy and certain destiny." The critic also dislikes the mythology for being not

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(i) See Monthly Review Vol.65 p.55 & 113  
May & June 1811.



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merely the machinery of the poem, but the very substance of it.

One quality, "that peculiar trait of his genius... 'the pathetic and the refined'," is repeatedly praised at the expense of less tasteful features. For example:- "he has genius; he has knowledge; he has, above all, the vivid conception and dissolving tenderness of a poet:- why will not some Angel whisper in his ear, 'Southey, have a taste?'"

Little in the way of fresh thought was added by the Literary Panorama, which is much less hostile (i) and much more polite. There is however one original touch in this review. "We venture to assert," says the critic, "that Mr. Southey never composed any work with greater delight than this....Did not Mr. S. indulge himself when he penned the following description?" (The quotation is a picture of Indra's palace, built of fire and water.) "Many such 'fitful splendours' of the imagination occur in this volume: they impart to it a distinguishing character; producing wonder at the poet's talent of educing delight from absolute contradictions." Fantastic description of this kind is so engrossing that, while reading, we are willing to endeavour to suspend our recollection of the incongruities by which it was introduced." This

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(i) See Literary Panorama Vol.9 p.1045 June 1811

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sentence is strangely parallel, both in content and form, to that on poetic faith uttered much later by Coleridge.

The British Critic again with a late notice, (i) made no pretence about its preconceived dislike of Kehama. "The task of reading it, we confess, was undertaken with reluctance." The poet has many admirers, but only among "persons who think that original thought and brilliant imagery can make amends for every other defect....How must that understanding be constructed, which can delight to copy, invent, or work upon such strange and incongruous fictions?"

After allowing praise to some parts of the poem, the critic goes on to consider what would be the result if it were generally received. The answer is a queer mixture of the Monthly Review and Wordsworth's 1800 Preface, and yet it contains more than a grain of truth: "Nothing less than the total extinction of public taste. Extravagance for ever substituted for nature, and a sickly and insatiate appetite for wild fiction prevailing in every reader." But the closing comments on Southey make a new point. It is one with which every reader of taste would agree to-day, and it may be quoted here as fitly closing a chapter in Southey's career:- "We sincerely admire his genius;

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(i) See British Critic Vol.39.p.273 March 1812

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if.....it could be married to the mortal maid common sense, the union would be the happiest that could be imagined. He courts the amiable nymph sometimes in prose; and then, in our opinion, he rises above himself."

John Foster, writing in the Eclectic Review (1) objected to the "scandalous" impiety of calling Kehama the Man-Almighty. In describing little realistic details and in imagining the feelings of his characters, Southey is unsurpassed. But the heathen heaven is gaudy ad taedium. Foster condemns the poem as a whole because it is absurd and therefore disgusting. "Can the poet imagine a possibility of pleasing any one mortal by all this idle devilment?" Worse still the poem is pagan; "It vacates the eternal throne ....to elevate Seeva, the adored abomination of the Hindoos.. .. And to this paganism, the poet has most earnestly laboured....to transfer what is peculiar to the true theology." A notice that shows how touchy reviews could be.

Joan was the first poem to bring Southey fame; Kehama was the last published before his laureation. ?  
How far had he advanced in the reviewers' estimation between these two productions? The revolutionary epic was remarkably well received, although virtually only the Whig press took notice of it. Their appreciation

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(1) See Eclectic Review V.7 p.185, 334 Mar.Apr.1811

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is understandable on political grounds; the Whigs pardoned much for its "noble spirit of freedom." But all agreed that the poem suffered from youthful exuberance, and it must be carefully observed that the praise was given to it as blossom rather than fruit, as a promise of greatness to come, not as great in itself.

It is strange how firmly this last idea took root. Every contemporary critic of Southey, friendly or hostile, made the assumption, explicitly or implicitly, that he was capable of excelling in a major poem. Now the rambling incoherence of his work makes it quite obvious that Southey lacked the constructive power essential for any work on the grand scale, while the other, and apparently incurable faults which the reviews mentioned, further indicated that success in the epic was at least unlikely. Yet to that generation the idea of his success did not seem so wildly improbable. The epic had not yet been abandoned as a forlorn hope. Southey wrote epics containing indications of some poetic ability; if the faults were removed they would be good epics; therefore Southey had it in him to write good epics. The logic seemed inescapable. Besides, Southey took his poetry very seriously, and the critics, if they could comprehend their victims, always did them the honour of meeting them on their own ground. The later poems were rated on their own merits, and the difference between Southey's actual performance and what the



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critics expected of him to some extent explains the disgruntled attitude of the majority to him. They were always looking for a magnum opus which never materialised.

This fundamentally false approach does not however quite vitiate the criticisms on the three later poems. Thalaba fulfilled Southey's aim of attracting serious attention, and although the reviewers were almost unanimous in condemning the wild tale there must have been a section of the public which echoed the Critical's outcry, "We will enjoy." The exotic theme chimed in with the taste of the moment, and, as has been already indicated, the greatly increased notice taken of Madoc shows that Southey had achieved popularity. The latter poem, to judge by the reviews, was Southey's high-water mark. It was more acceptable than the rest because it was more normal. The plot was less wild and the metre was a familiar one. Its successor seemed something of a retrogression. In none of the reviews, however, do we get that sense of development, of a new mode of thought or feeling at last creating a public for itself which we have observed in Wordsworth's case. Was the reason that Southey had really nothing new to offer?

part a  
criticism?

We may, however, take a last glance at the consensus of opinion on what he did put forward.

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About two virtues all the critics were agreed; Southey was at his best in domestic scenes, and he could write descriptive verse. If Southey had taken them at their word, and forsaken the epic with his Jacobinism, he might have been a memorable poet and not merely a figure in the history of literature. His prose, of course, is another matter.

Contemporary opinion was divided on the quality of his style. Flexibility and copiousness no one denied it. The majority of the critics however attributed to it the vices of these virtues - prosaicalness and verbosity. Only the Critical on Thalaba had the courage to deny that it was diffuse. Kehama in the general opinion also suffered from over-richness and superfluities, while tameness was the prevailing fault of Madoc.

Southey's experiments with free verse had remarkably little effect on the poetry of his time, but naturally received much critical attention. It will have been noticed that they are condemned on two counts. Firstly, his avowed intention of reforming the laws of verse is considered insolent; secondly the new verse fails in its purpose, being actually more fatiguing and monotonous than a regular metre would be. The critics were right in condemning Southey's experiments; free verse cannot be written

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in the ways that he attempted. But they were scarcely justified in denying the possibility of free verse, as Christabel was to show.

A few, a very few, critics pretended to admire Southey's character drawing, but most of the partial reviewers were honest enough to admit that his powers were certainly not for the dramatic. On the untidiness of his plots and on the piecemeal yet continuous borrowing of his material little need be said. Even his friends at best made excuses for him here.

There remains one point at issue between the pros and the contras, which caused quite a pother at the time, although it seems almost irrelevant to-day. The best of the critics, headed by Jeffrey, insisted on the childish, fairy-tale quality of the plots. Now, to write epics that were not food for men was a serious crime, and here it was undeniable. There was however some answer to be made. Various critics strove to justify Southey on the excellent moral purpose of the poems. This suggestion first made its appearance in connection with Madoc, which, as has been recorded, the Imperial Review called "just and benevolent beyond anything that could be expected of human nature." The Annual Review also mentioned the majesty of the theme. The British Critic countered this with moral scruples on the mass conver-

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sion of the heathen. Jeffrey's contribution to the argument was to the effect that Southey's goodness was goody-goodness. Scott in the Quarterly simultaneously gave the fullest statement of the other case. The Critical oddly enough agreed with the Quarterly on this topic, while the Literary Panorama actually found the same poem, Kehama, in parts immoral. The strange thing is that this justification of Southey indeed took hold of the public mind, and for long remained the current reason for reading him, or letting the young read him. The last word on the subject was said by Sir Leslie Stephen :-

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I do not doubt that this (i.e. the moral nobility of his characters) ought to be felt; only it must be confessed that it has to struggle with certain difficulties. Boys (I can answer for one case) used to read Thalaba and the curse of Kehama, as they read the Arabian Nights....The pleasure came from the curious stories of eccentric mythology which Southey had extracted from his multifarious reading....The lofty stoicism only adds a touch of the comic to this topsy-turvy world of the totally irrationally. Fairyland is a very pleasant region in its way, and so is the philosophical world of ethical ideals, but somehow they do not blend very easily."

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No great poet ever built up a reputation on such airy foundations as Coleridge. Literally airy, for his fame must have been created mainly by talk about him. In both 1796 and 1798 he published a small volume of poems, in 1800 Wordsworth gave his name to the public as the author of The Ancient Mariner, and then for sixteen years he did not issue a single book of verse. Yet as we shall see, when Christabel was published, it was taken as a matter of course that he was one of the greatest of living poets.

Poems on Various Subjects (1796) contained the Monody on Chatterton and Religious Musings.

The volume is briefly dismissed by the British Critic which thinks it tender and elegant, (1)  
but immature and inexperienced.

The Analytical Review, being a Whig organ, (2)  
likes Coleridge's "ardent love of liberty," but does not stress the political aspect. Quotations are given from the Monody and some other things.

Religious Musings is described as "a pretty long poem, in blank verse, chiefly valuable for the importance

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(1) See British Critic Vol.7 p.549 1796

(2) See Analytical Review Vol.23 p.610  
June 1796

of the sentiments which it contains, and the ardour with which they are expressed."

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The Monthly Review, also sympathetic, lays (1)  
a little more emphasis on Coleridge's Jacobinism,  
but not too much, since "the sweet and the pathetic  
may be reckoned peculiarly congenial to his nature."  
The critic finds his poetry especially interesting  
because it is "not fashioned to the polish and  
correctness of modern verse." A note on the Monody,  
which is considered too good to quote from, gives us  
the contemporary view of Pantisocracy:- "A project of  
which we have already heard, as emanating from the  
fervid minds of this poet and two or three congenial  
friends, to realize a golden age in some imaginary  
'undivided dale of freedom:' but which, on sober  
reflection, we do not wonder to find him call  
' - vain Phantasies!'" Religious Musings receives  
high praise, being placed "on the top of the scale of  
sublimity....The book of Revelations may be a  
dangerous fount of prophecy, but it is no mean  
Helicon of poetic inspiration. Who will deny genius  
to such conceptions as the following?" The quotation  
is that fine paragraph "O ye numberless...." contain-  
ing the line "And die so slowly, that none call it

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(1) See Monthly Review Vol.20 p.195 June 1796

murder."

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Of this verse the Critical Review aptly says (1)  
"A richer line....we scarcely ever remember reading."  
Like Southey, Coleridge was fortunate enough to catch  
this paper in Whiggish mood: "His poems glow with [an]  
ardor of passion, [an] enthusiastic love of liberty."  
"Some blemishes" are indicated, but excused as being  
"such as are incident to young men of luxuriant  
imagination."

From these notices it is obvious that  
Coleridge was regarded as quite a pleasing young poet,  
and nothing more. This impression was in the main  
correct. There was nothing in this volume, except for  
some faint quickenings in Religious Musings to herald  
the appearance of a strangely new poet. The 1798  
publication, Fears in Solitude, was a severer test of  
critical sensibility. Besides the title poem it  
contained the ode, France, and Frost at Midnight.

The Analytical Review, in a definitely (2)  
political notice, finds this volume still unequal in  
merit, although emended in one respect. Coleridge is

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(1) See Critical Review Vol.17 p.209 June 1796

(2) See Analytical Review Vol.28 p.590 Dec. 1798

now "unusually sparing of imagery," and what imagery there is, is "unusually free from extravagance." This review, of course, likes the theme of Fears in Solitude and quotes twenty-three lines in which Coleridge speaks of Britain's national sins: "We have offended, oh! my countrymen!...." It continues, "Mr. C., in common with many others of the purest patriotism, has been slandered with the appellation of an enemy to his country. The following passage, we presume, will be sufficient to wipe away the injurious stigma." The passage in question is the paragraph, "Spare us yet awhile...."

Of Frost at Midnight little is said as a poem, but it does "great honour to the poet's feelings, as the husband of an affectionate wife, and as the father of a cradled infant. May he long enjoy the life and the felicity of them both!"

The British Critic also stresses the political aspect, but for the opposite reason. It allows Coleridge sensibility and poetic power, but regrets "his absurd and preposterous prejudices against his country." For this reason the "expressive tenderness" of Frost at Midnight is preferred. It is asked how Coleridge justifies the accusation against Britain of

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(1) See British Critic Vol.13 p.662 May 1799



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tyranny over multitudes? Some of the objectionable passages are quoted and dismissed as "the hasty emotion of a young man....without experience."

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The Critical Review was now Tory and was rather dubious about the sincerity of S. T. C. 's Anti-jacobinism as expressed in Fears in Solitude:- "Without being a ministerialist, Mr. Coleridge has become an alarmist. He pictures the horrors of invasion, and joins the war-whoop against what he calls 'an impious foe...'" But has he really recanted? Surely the opinion, that "we have offended" is not the fashionable one. Apparently nothing but 'my country right or wrong' would satisfy the zeal of the newly reformed Critical. As for France, "the conclusion of the ode is very ridiculous.... What does Mr. Coleridge mean by liberty in this passage? or what connexion has it with the subject of civil freedom?"

Frost at Midnight is very beautiful, "but the lines respecting the film occupy too great a part of it. The first poem strikes us as the best: the passage we have quoted is admirable: and we could have given many of equal beauty." Although the

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(1) See Critical Review Vol.26 p.472 Aug. 1799.

critic misses a characteristic excellence here, it is pleasant to see his whole-hearted recognition of merit in a poem where his political opinions were so involved.

From these reviews we may gather that at this date the portrait of Coleridge in the public mind was that of a capable young versifier with a kindly, thoughtful turn of mind and rather peculiar, if not dangerous, political views. This picture was not so near the truth as that of 1796. Only the Critical had responded, and that unfavourably, to the peculiar Coleridge touch, which appeared quite unmistakably in this volume. Because he handles political subjects, his work is reviewed as if it were a newspaper leader rather than a poem. The rights and the wrongs of his politics loom greater than his success in converting opinions into poetry. Perhaps this fault is inseparable from an age whose political consciousness is hypersensitive.

Eighteen years of poetic silence followed, during which Coleridge mysteriously acquired a reputation and Christabel was handed about in manuscript. At last in 1816 this unfinished masterpiece was published along with Kubla Khan and the Pains of Sleep; a volume of faery gold, which well might assay the assayers. It received much attention, but perhaps the most astonishing comment on the volume was utter silence; The Quarterly Review did not publish a single word on this volume, or on Biographia

Literaria, or on Sibylline Leaves. The omission is obviously intentional. It would be possible but rather unprofitable to speculate on the reasons behind it.

The first of the actual notices appeared in the Critical Review, which in the interval had undergone several changes of proprietor and staff. It is very much on the side of the angels, beginning by informing those who love to "damn the worth they cannot imitate" that they will find here "some food to satisfy their diseased appetite"; on the other hand, those who love genius "will read with generous enthusiasm", since the defects "appear to bear a most insignificant proportion to the perfections." As a further indication of Coleridge's reputation we may count the rapid sale of the volume, here mentioned as a proof of its popularity.

Christabel, the reviewer hopes, will some day be completed, "but we fear that the task will be at least wearisome to a man of the listless habits of Mr. Coleridge. For ourselves we confess, that when we read the story in M.S. two, or three years ago, it appeared to be one of those dreamlike productions whose charm partly consisted in the undefined obscurity of the conclusion." ( This<sup>is</sup> not only accurate comment.

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(1) See Critical Review Fifth Series Vol.3 p.504

It shows the extent to which Coleridge had impressed himself on the public mind that the critic could take it for granted that a casual reference to his private habits would be generally understood.)

A change of the public attitude to romance is shown by the critic's advice that the reader must be prepared to accept magic. Among the passages mentioned and quoted for commendation we may notice that on the "one red leaf, the last of its clan," the entry of Geraldine into the castle, and that on poisoned friendship, the last in the critic's opinion "lines finer than any in the language upon the same subject, with which we are acquainted, more especially the noble image at the end." Praise is given to the gradual revelation of Geraldine's malignity. Taken as a whole, "this very graceful and fanciful poem....is enriched with more beautiful passages than have ever been before included in so small a compass. Nothing can be better contrasted than Christabel and Geraldine - both exquisite, but both different....the one the gentle, soul-delighting Una - the other the seeming fair, but infamous Duesza. Of the rich and luxuriant imagery with which this poem abounds, our imperfect sketch will afford but a faint idea."

From the Pains of Sleep a nightmare is quoted, but Kubla Khan "is one of those pieces that can only speak for itself."

A less judicious and more (even offensively) personal criticism appeared in the Eclectic Review.



(1) 180

This paper also speaks of Christabel being long known in manuscript as the inspirer of other poems. The reviewer works into this passage a nasty cut about "the pre-eminent abilities of which its Author is known by his friends, we cannot say to have the command, but to sustain the responsibility."

The general verdict is in the main favourable. "We cannot conceal that the effect of the present publication upon readers in general, will be that of disappointment....Yet we are much mistaken if this fragment, such as it is, will not be found to take faster hold of the mind than many a poem six cantos long." A contrast is drawn between the basic material of the usual tale of terror and the subtle horror of Christabel, "the purely imaginative feeling, the breathless thrill of indefinite emotion of which we are conscious when in the supposed presence of an unknown being, or acted upon by some influence mysteriously transcending the notice of the senses." The comment on the witch's spell is worth recording:- "If this be the invention of the Poet's brain, and it partakes of his wildly metaphysical cast of thought, it must be conceded that he deserves a patent for its ingenuity. One cannot conceive of a more terrible engine of supernatural malice. But are not the spells of vicious example in real life almost a counterpart to this fiction?"

But, for the other two poems, "We can only

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(1) See Eclectic Review N.S. Vol.5 p.565 June 1816

regret the publication of them." Kubla Khan is "professedly....a psychological curiosity," but the poor quality of the verse makes the manner of composition seem not remarkable. To conclude the reviewer turns round and fairly preaches at poor Coleridge:- "We closed the present publication with sentiments of melancholy and regret, not unmixed with pity. In what an humbling attitude does such a man as Coleridge present himself to the public, in laying before them these specimens of the rich promise of excellence, with which sixteen years ago he raised the expectations of his friends, - pledges of future greatness which after sixteen years he has failed to redeem! He is now once more loudly called upon to break off his desultory and luxurious habits, and to brace his mind to intellectual exertion."

The Literary Panorama, polite as usual, opens (1) with the shrewd observation that Christabel will probably never be completed or a fragment of it would not have been published. The lines given by Coleridge in the introduction to Kubla Khan are quoted with the peculiarly irrelevant remark:- "If Mr. Coleridge's two hundred lines were all of equal merit with [these],, which he has preserved, we are ready to admit that he has reason to be grieved at their loss." In the Pains

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(1) See Literary Panorama N.S. Vol.4 p.561 July 1816

of Sleep the critic notices "the vividness of the author's conceptions, mingled with that peculiarity of thought and diction which the mountain scenery of our lakes seems to inspire in all who court its influence."

As might be imagined from its title, the Augustan Review shows no great friendliness to the romantic poets. It can admire their love of liberty and their desire for something "finer, more ethereal, and more animating than the dry bones which surround us in this vale of tears", but hates their ridiculous affectation of simplicity. Its complaints have little claim to novelty, and the writer is singularly misinformed. For instance, he thinks Christabel has been written in imitation of Scott and Byron on a Lakist foundation. A typical comment is that on the entry into the castle: "truly simple and infantine.... Mr. Coleridge's own 'Idiot Boy' could not have made his conjectures about the howling of the old toothless mastiff-bitch, with a more natural lisp?" The lines on lost friends are the "vilest jargon", and so forth. Marks are awarded to the passages approved by the critic - the gothic room "very good", Geraldine's transformation "excellent". The notice, one cannot call it a criticism, closes with a final outburst against babyishness and extravagance.

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(1) See Augustan Review Vol.3 p.14 July 1816

Byron was one of those who had read Christabel in manuscript, and in a note to the third canto of Childe Harold he referred to it as "that <sup>wild</sup> and singularly original and beautiful poem." Most of the remaining critics of the poem seemed incapable of forgetting the allusion. The first to draw attention to it was the British Review. Although recently founded, this paper had ideas which would have seemed well enough about 1807, but which now began to look old-fashioned and obstinate. It starts to work on Coleridge reasonably enough: "There is a land of dreams with which poets hold an unrestricted commerce, and where they may load their imaginations with whatever strange products they find in the country; and if we are content with the raw material, there is no end to the varieties of chaotic originalities which may be brought away from this fantastic region." This raw material needs to be worked up. "There must be something to connect these visionary forms with the realities of existence"

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This is an excellent abstract rule, not unconnected with the whole Lakist philosophy of poetry, but shortly we come upon a dogmatic circumscription of the poet's province: "A witch is no heroine, nor can we read a tale of magic for its own sake." Another paragraph has quite a familiar ring about it: "We really must make a stand somewhere for the rights of common sense.... We must require [the poet] to be

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(1) See British Review Vol.8 p.64 Aug.1816



intelligible."

In his preface Coleridge speaks of his poetic powers having been for long in a state of suspended animation. To this the critic adds, "Now we cannot but suspect that there is a little anachronism in this statement, and that in truth it was during this suspense of the author's poetical powers that this 'wild and singularly original and beautiful poem' of Christabel was conceived and partly executed."

From here the critic proceeds to a denunciation of the modern cliques of poets and all their affectations, the most insufferable of all being "the cant and gibberish of the German school....profound nonsense, unintelligible refinement, metaphysical morals, and mental distortion." After more of this general vituperation, the critic returns to the poem itself:- "We learn two things, and two things only with certainty from this 'wild and singularly original and beautiful poem:' that Sir Leoline was 'rich', and that he 'had a toothless mastiff-bitch'....From the moment we leave the picturesque old lady (for we cannot but suspect the bitch to be a witch in that form) all is impenetrable to us."

It is a genuine relief to have Jeffrey's assurance that he did not write the Christabel article in the Edinburgh Review. We have seen how pungent he

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(1) See Edinburgh Review Vol.27p.58 Sept.1816

could be. But so far as we have gone, all the criticisms in his paper have been gentlemanly. The present review is cheap and nasty, cheap in its sarcasms, nasty in its allusions. The thought that it was possibly written by Hazlitt is rather an alarming one. The political vituperation is quite in keeping with what he could write, but in any aspect the notice would be a blot on his critical integrity if it were proved his. In point of style it does not read like Hazlitt's work, but more like the heavy slogging of Brougham, an example of which is given in the next chapter - his review of the Hours of Idleness.

In the Christabel notice, play is made with Byron's recommendation, while his reliability as a judge is called in question. These "wild and lawless poets" who abandon the rules can always go one better than before. "Forth steps Mr. Coleridge, like a giant refreshed with sleep, and as if to redeem his character after so long a silence....breaks out in these precise words." (Meaning thereby the first fifteen lines.

The vulgarity of the review may be judged from this extract:- "[Christabel and Geraldine] arrive at the castle, and pass the night in the same bedroom; not to disturb Sir Leoline, who, it seems, was poorly at the time, and, of course, must have been called up to speak to the chamber-maid, and have the sheets aired, if Lady G. had had a room to herself." Much more of this sort of thing occurs, Geraldine is said

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to have "recourse to the bottle", the angry Baron behaves "as if he had discovered that his daughter had been seduced", and so forth. The critic finds the conclusion of part two wholly incomprehensible.

As for the metrical system, "We say nothing of the monstrous assurance of any man coming forward coolly at this time of day, and telling the readers of English poetry....that he makes his metre on a new principle!" but we utterly deny the truth of the assertion.... We give two or three specimens, to confound at once this miserable piece of coxcombry and shuffling." Some half-dozen lines are quoted. Even if these examples did not contain four accents, they would not invalidate the poet's general principle. Actually the choice of examples is disingenuous, the majority being half-lines, and indented by the printer as such, while some of the others do contain four accents; e.g. "I pray you drink this cordial wine." This surely is shuffling, if not coxcombry.

The nastiness begins with relating the back-ground to Kubla Khan. "Mr. Coleridge was in bad health;- the particular disease is not given; but the careful reader will form his own conjectures. He had retired very prudently to a lonely farm-house." A little later: "The lines here given smell strongly, it must be owned, of the anodyne.... Perhaps a dozen more such lines as the [concluding ones] would reduce the most irritable of critics to a state of inaction." The Pains of Sleep is "mere raving," a result of the



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fact that "persons in this poet's unhappy condition, generally feel the want of sleep as the worst of their evils."

Thereafter the reviewer really gives his peevishness the reins: "We look upon this publication as one of the most notable pieces of impertinence of which the press has lately been guilty; and one of the boldest experiments that has yet been made on the patience or understanding of the public." Previous Lakist productions have shown some "gleams of feeling or of fancy. But the thing now before us, is utterly destitute of value. It exhibits from beginning to end not a ray of genius; and we defy any man to point out a passage of poetical merit in any of the three pieces." The lines on broken friendship are partially excepted from this sweeping condemnation. "Must we then be doomed to hear such a mixture of raving and driv'ling, extolled as the work of a 'wild and original' genius? ... And are such panegyrics to be echoed by the mean tools of a political faction, because they relate to one whose daily prose is understood to be dedicated to the support of all that courtiers think should be supported?" If that is the case, they should adhere "to the good old system of rewarding their champions with places and pensions, instead of puffing their bad poetry."

Together with this review, we may couple another which appeared a few months earlier in the



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Examiner, and which was more probably written by Hazlitt, and certainly bears the marks of his style. The two agree on many points, but this one is much more restrained, containing no personal nor political references. If Hazlitt were responsible for both, there is no apparent reason why the gratuitous acerbities of the one should be entirely absent from the other. As we shall see, there is one important difference; the Examiner really makes something of Kubla Khan.

The review begins: "The fault of Mr. Coleridge is that he comes to no conclusion.... From an excess of capacity, he does little or nothing." The opening of Christabel is condemned: "We wonder that Mr. Murray, who has an eye for things, should suffer this 'mastiff bitch' to come into his shop.... There is a dishonesty as well as affectation in all this.... This is what is called throwing a crust to the critics. If the beauties of Christabel should not be sufficiently admired, Mr Coleridge may lay it all to two lines which he had too much manliness to omit in complaisance to the bad taste of his contemporaries." But on the other hand, he has omitted the essential line, revealing that Geraldine is a witch, "Hideous, deformed, and pale of hue," which the writer restores from his memory of the manuscript. "It is the keystone of the arch." For that reason Mr Coleridge left it out. Now this is a

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(1) See Examiner 2nd June 1816 &  
Hazlitt Collected Works Vol. 11 p. 580

greater physiological [sic] curiosity than even the fragment of Kubla Khan."

As a whole Christabel "is more like a dream than a reality.... There is something disgusting at the bottom of his subject, which is but ill glossed over by a veil of Della Cruscan sentiment and fine writing - like moon-beams playing on a charnel-house, or flowers strewed on a dead body." There is however "one genuine outburst of humanity, worthy of the author," the lines on broken friendship once more. The conclusion again is "absolutely incomprehensible."

The comment on Kubla Khan is worthy of the author, if Hazlitt wrote it, and it is quite typical of him, "Kubla Khan, we think, only shows that Mr. Coleridge can write better nonsense verses than any man in England. It is not a poem, but a musical composition." The lines "A damsel with a dulcimer..." are quoted and the review concludes, "We could repeat these lines to ourselves not the less often for not knowing the meaning of them." It needs a little reflection to realise the astonishing accuracy of both these paradoxes.

The criticism in the European Magazine was rather a special one, being initialled G.F.M., that is Keats's friend, George Felton Mathew. Almost half a page is spent in saying what the poem is not, before

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(1) See European Magazine Vol. 74 p. 434. Nov. 1816

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discussing what it actually is. As Lord Byron says it is wildly original, but it is sometimes also "incoherently unintelligible." "It is not, therefore, to be judged of by comparison, but by those effects which it produces upon the hearts and imaginations of its readers." Here we are on the right lines again.

The greatest peculiarity of Coleridge's style is his combination of contraries; as an example of this the conclusion of the poem is quoted, a passage which had puzzled the two former critics completely. Among the other quotations the passage on broken friendship appears again, with the description of Christabel's room and "The night is chill, the forest bare..." The one red leaf is pointed out as being rather minute, "but too new, too natural, and too obvious not to be considerably effective, and this one passage may atone for many of the inconsistencies of Christabel."

The notice in the Monthly Review adds (1)  
absolutely nothing. The critic dislikes the metrical principle, but takes the trouble to explain it. Kubla Khan, interesting as psychology, is "below criticism" as poetry. The Pains of Sleep is considered the best thing in the book, the critic admiring the simplicity of the two opening paragraphs. He is, however, "convinced that every principle of correct writing, as far

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(1) Monthly Review Vol.82 p.22 Jan. 1817

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as poetry is concerned, has been long given up."

The distribution of praise and blame in these criticisms shows the appearance of a new element at least as far as the Lakists are concerned. The Edinburgh still allows politics to exert an evil influence, although it would have damned the book on poetical grounds in any case. The new element is preoccupation with Coleridge's morals. This development must not be confused on the one hand with personal prejudice, which we have seen in action already, nor on the other with discussion of the philosophy of the poems, which occupied the reviews of, for instance, the Excursion. It is an interest in Coleridge's character as such. The Critical simply mentions his weakness as a fact relevant to the incompleted state of Christabel; the Edinburgh handles it as another weapon with which to attack the poet; but the Eclectic takes a more serious line. Its endeavour is to reform the poet as a man. In another chapter we shall see how far-reaching could be this concern for the moral influence of poetry and for the moral character of its author.

Another non-literary feature of the reviews will be observed; it is not a new one - the accusation of working in a clique. Unfortunately for the accusers, Byron was not a member of the Lake school. Apparently any poet rash enough to praise Coleridge must be an interested person, and it was inconceivable



that another might sincerely admire his work without being one of his intimates.

Out of the literary ordeal, the reviews emerge rather better than might be expected. The Critical touches the essential points of Christabel - the "willing suspension of disbelief"; the slow horror; the great richness of the imagery. It even makes something of Kubla Khan. From the reviewer's unwillingness to quote it may be surmised that he appreciated the fragment as a piece of word-music, which aspect was also seized on by the critical awareness of Hazlitt, if it were Hazlitt, in the Examiner. The Eclectic seems to have missed the point of Kubla Khan altogether, perhaps by trying to make too much sense of it. But its analysis of the magic in Christabel is more accurate. The evangelical temperament of the reviewer, which made him preach at Coleridge, is a positive advantage here, as it drives him to seek the true springs of the horror. He was right to do so, because the spiritual quality of Coleridge's conception of evil has made it enduring. Southey's idea of magic and evil was basically physical and his creations are dead. These two reviews between them omit little of value in Coleridge's achievement. George Felton Mathew, a little more conventional, is however one more name to add to the list of those demanding that poetry should be judged by results, not rules. He is interested, it will be noticed, in the moral influence of the poem

rather than the morals of the poet. The hostile reviews were almost insignificant as criticism, but must have severely prejudiced the book's chance of a fair reception. After reading the notice in the British Review one understands what Byron meant when he called it "My Grandmother's Review." It is difficult to believe that it or the Augustan Review had any influence except with those who were already case-hardened in like prejudices. The disapproval of the Edinburgh Review is not surprising. Essentially the criticism is a restatement of that paper's fundamental objection to the Lake School, that it is both revolutionary and childish. The charge of sycophancy was not made for the first time either. But any real meaning was taken out of the article by its vulgar irrelevance. Jeffrey could turn a serious story into a flippant one but his method did not consist of adding ridiculous details as is done here. Nor have we yet detected him in attacks on the personal lives of his literary victims. Their political conduct was a different matter, though equally irrelevant. We may regard this article as the false dawn of Black<sup>k</sup>guardism, which appeared above the horizon before many months were over. The Examiner's hostility was mainly political in origin, though not in expression. The criticisms are however reasonable. Even the comment on the charnel-house atmosphere can be justified; there is nothing capricious about it.

Sibylline Leaves (1817) gave the critics an excellent chance of reviewing Coleridge's work as a whole. Perhaps it came too soon after Christabel, however, as few papers took the opportunity.

The first review was a mocking article written at a week's notice for the Literary Gazette, and couched in this fashion. "We learn that it contains the whole of the author's poetical compositions from 1793 to the present date, except a few works not yet finished, ( Heaven defend us from more of Christabel!!! )" (1)

The Three Graves is analysed as a typical poem, a singularly unfair choice, as that poem could hardly be regarded as typical of Coleridge's best work, or even of his work as a whole. The following, however, are the qualities that the critic finds in it. "There is the close alliance of beauty and deformity; the union of fine poetical thought with the most trivial commonplace; feeling bound to vulgarity; dignity of language to the vilest doggerel.... The sublime and the ridiculous have not even a step between them."

The juvenile tale of The Raven is quoted

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(1) See Literary Gazette Vol. 1 p.49 July 26th 1817

as "really about the most amusing of the whole."

A few months later this unflattering notice was followed by a very favourable one in Constable's Edinburgh Magazine, Blackwood's rival. It is taken for granted that Coleridge is famous for at least one poem: "Every reader of modern poetry is acquainted of course with the 'Ancient Mariner.'" Incidentally it is in this volume that that poem first appears in its present ~~modern~~ form. The critic's comment on it is a little startling, but contains some truth: "This production has always appeared to us in the light of a very good caricature of the genius of its author."

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The analysis of Coleridge's typical qualities is also fairly shrewd. In particular the critic draws attention to "a wildness of narrative", though he finds it more difficult to define or illustrate what he means by that. A contrast is drawn between Southey's treatment of scenery and Coleridge's. The former is merely exact, with no emotional significance in his pictures; the latter surrounds his landscapes with a halo of feeling. Nature assumes a delightful freshness in "the light and sunshine of his genius" - "nature breathing all pleasant odours, and glittering

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(1) See Edinburgh Magazine Vol.1 p.245 Oct. 1817



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with all brilliant lights." Coleridge's pathos is not like that which "gives often so inexpressible a charm to the compositions of Mr. Wordsworth. Yet there is a pathos of another kind which is very frequent with our author; a gentle and subdued tone of sympathy with human happiness or human suffering; an exquisite feeling of the charities and joys of domestic life; and a just appreciation of the necessity and value of religious consolations."

On the other side of the scale this critic sets Coleridge's sentimentality and "that mystical interpretation of the expressions of Nature, which has become the favourite occupation of Mr. Wordsworth's muse." The poet's affectations and fondness for inversions are also reprobated. In conclusion, Coleridge is advised not to write any more unless he feels the urge to do so.

"Gifted....with much the strongest and most original powers of all the WATER-POETS of the day, why has he fallen short even of the confined praise, and comparative popularity, which have attended his brethren of the Lakes?" Such is the question posed by the critic of the Monthly Review. He decides that the fault is partly Coleridge's own: "In the first instance ....he compresses matter enough for a handsome volume into a two-penny pamphlet; then he lets a friend bury

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(1) See Monthly Review Vol.88 p.25 Jan.1818

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his jewels in a heap of sand of his own; then he scatters his 'Sibylline Leaves' over half a hundred perishable newspapers and magazines; then he suffers a manuscript-poem to be handed about among his friends till all its bloom is brushed off; how can such a poet, so managing his own concerns, hope to be popular?" There is no sustained work which can be associated with his name, and the fact that his higher qualities demand an exertion of thought before they can be appreciated is a further disability. The implications of the last objection should be carefully considered in the light of the subsequent trend of poetry.

From the Ancient Mariner, written when "'rawheads and bloody bones' were the only fashionable entertainment", the critic kindly rescues some inspired passages, such as the description of the ship becalmed and the final return to port. The Lines in a Concert Room are said to "prove the satirical power of the author; in which, we are inclined to think, his main strength lies." With such contrasting comments, the critic goes through the book, usually spoiling a compliment with an ungracious touch.

A very belated notice appeared in Gold's London Magazine. There was apparently an intention to continue the article, but fortunately for the Magazine no continuation appeared. The portion that is printed

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(1) See Gold's London Magazine Vol.2 p.70 July 1820

is exactly in the tone of the Edinburgh Review on Christabel. Most of it is taken up with a mocking account of the Ancient Mariner, which refers regularly to the North Pole as the scene of the poem, and which contains such elegant comments as this:- "To add to the distresses of the 'Ancient Mariner' he discovers, on feeling whether the frill of his shirt is whole or not, that the cursed Albatross is hung round his neck, a graceful substitute no doubt for a rope." The writer sums up with the supposition that the poem is an allegory in defence of the game laws.

If we remember that Sibylline Leaves was virtually the sum of Coleridge's poetical work, and that the majority of his critics had already spoken of him as a major poet, the attention it received from the contemporary press seems wretchedly inadequate. Apart from the criticisms mentioned above, the volume received only passing notice from the British Critic and a review in Blackwood's Magazine to which reference will be made later in this chapter. The critics simply ignored the most important book of verse published by a man whom, a few months earlier, they had agreed to call a great poet. This was his claim to greatness and they did not take the trouble even to dismiss it.

Biographia Literaria published in the same year, 1817, fared a little better, and

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although outwith the immediate scope of this chapter the reviews of it are interesting because the book reopened the discussion of the points at issue between Jeffrey and the Lake School. It also furnished an excuse for Blackwood's notorious attack on the poet.

The Edinburgh Review's reply to Coleridge's arguments was probably the joint work of Jeffrey and Hazlitt. The Biographia is introduced as "not so properly an account of his Life and Opinions, as an Apology for them." (1)

In 1799 there appeared a collection called the Beauties of the Anti-Jacobin containing the New Morality, a poem attacking various English Jacobins, including Coleridge and his friends. To it there was appended a note, which had not figured in the original Anti-Jacobin, attacking Coleridge's supposed philosophy and concluding; "Since this time he has left his native country, commenced citizen of the world, left his poor children fatherless, and his wife destitute. Ex his disce, his friends LAMB and SOUTHEY."

Coleridge, quoting these words in a foot-note, shows the obvious absurdity of applying them to Lamb and Southey, and asks "Is it surprising that many good men remained longer than perhaps they otherwise would have done, adverse to a party, which encouraged and openly rewarded the author of such atrocious calumnies?"

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(1) See Edinburgh Review Vol.28 p.488 Aug.1817



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The Edinburgh rejoins by inquiring how he could ever join a party "who could with impunity, and triumphantly, take away by atrocious calumnies the characters of all who disdained to be their tools, - and rewarded with honours, places, and pensions all those who were. This is pitiful enough; we confess; but it is too painful to be dwelt on." Incidentally, Coleridge's defence of Southey's private character is unnecessary and it is no defence of his public character. The review praises Southey's "clear and easy style", but "on practical and political matters, we cannot think him a writer of any weight." He is a "mere bookworm," out of sympathy with the common man. "His essays are in fact the contents of his common-place book, strung together with little thought or judgment, and rendered marketable by their petulant adaptation to party purposes."

"With Chapter IV begins the formidable ascent of that mountainous and barren ridge of clouds piled on precipices and precipices on clouds, from the top of which the author deludes us with a view of the Promised Land that divides the regions of Fancy from those of the Imagination.... The object of this long-winding metaphysical march, which resembles a patriarchal journey, is to point out and settle the true grounds of Mr. Wordsworth's claim to originality as a poet; which, if we rightly understand the deduction, turns out to be, that there is nothing peculiar about him; and that his poetry, in so far as it is good for

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anything at all, is just like any other good poetry." But unfortunately for us, the Edinburgh, as a party to the dispute, decides not to examine further the discussion of Wordsworth's poetry.

A long footnote, signed by Jeffrey, at this point rebuts Coleridge's charges of insincerity and misrepresentation. According to Coleridge, the little lawyer on a visit to Keswick was "treated with every hospitable attention by Mr. Southey and myself.... At no period in my life do I remember to have received so many, and such high coloured compliments in so short a space of time." Coleridge took the opportunity to explain that there was no Lake School, as the writers did not collaborate, yet Jeffrey continued to write of the "school of whining and hypochondriacal poets that haunt the Lakes." Jeffrey's defence was that his reception was one of mere formal politeness, and added rather naively that he flattered Coleridge because the poet appeared to like it. Since that date, when writing of the Lake poets he had been careful to take Coleridge's name "out of the firm".

Turning to the dispute about poetic diction, the critic, who sounds more like Hazlitt than Jeffrey from now on, thinks "the truth and common sense of the thing is so obvious" that no controversy is needed. Poetic diction exists, however, being the antithesis of slang, having elegant instead of vulgar associations. It is "made up of words.... warmed with the glow of genius, purified by the breath of time - that soften into distance, and expand into magnitude, whatever is

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seen through their medium, - that varnish over the trite and commonplace, and lend a gorgeous robe to the forms of fancy, but are only an incumbrance and a disguise in conveying the true touches of nature, the intense strokes of passion. The beauty of poetic diction is, in short, borrowed and artificial."

What is the essence of poetry, about which Coleridge bewilders himself so sadly? "Milton, we think, has told it in a single line - 'Thoughts that voluntary move Harmonious numbers.' Poetry is the music of language, expressing the music of the mind. Whenever any object takes such a hold on the mind as to make us dwell upon it, and brood over it, melting the heart in love, or kindling it to a sentiment of admiration; - whenever a movement of imagination or or passion is impressed on the mind, by which it seeks to prolong and repeat the emotion, to bring all other objects into accord with it, and to give the same movement of harmony, sustained and continuous, to the sounds that express it, - this is poetry. The musical in sound is the sustained and continuous; the musical in thought and feeling is the sustained and continuous also.... There is no natural harmony in the ordinary combinations of significant sounds: the language of prose is not the language of music, or of passion: and it is to supply this inherent defect in the mechanism of language - to make the sound an echo to the sense, when the sense becomes a sort of echo to itself...that

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poetry was invented." This amazingly sensitive and impassioned statement of poetic theory would repay careful study. It is sufficient for our purpose here to remark its existence. Its relation to Wordsworth's theory of the genesis of poetry is obvious, and the positive influence of such a mode of thought should be contrasted with the negative one of a code of rules. That poetics of this kind should find a place in the Edinburgh Review is an index of the change that had come over critical thought since Wordsworth started writing. Unfortunately all periodicals had not made a similar advance.

By way of peroration comes an astonishing outburst against poets as politicians: "They are dangerous leaders and treacherous followers. Their inordinate vanity runs them into all sorts of extravagances; and their habitual effeminacy gets them out of them at any price. Always pampering their own appetite for excitement, and wishing to astonish others, their whole aim is to produce a dramatic effect, one way or other - to shock or to delight their observers.... Jacobins or Antijacobins - outrageous advocates for anarchy and licentiousness, or flaming apostles of persecution - always violent and vulgar in their opinions, they oscillate, with a giddy and sickening motion, from one absurdity to another, and expiate the follies of their youth by the heartless vices of their advancing age."



The British Critic, which included some remarks on Sibylline Leaves, naturally defended the Lake group against the Whig attack. It finds some difficulty in explaining Coleridge's popularity. "For some reason or other his name is familiar to numbers who are altogether unacquainted with his compositions; and connected as it has been with the names of his two celebrated friends, Mr. Southey and Mr. Wordsworth, it has certainly been mentioned both in conversation and in print, more frequently than it is perhaps quite easy to account for." Actually his poetry shows little depth of feeling and less correct taste. "Wildness of imagination is the predominant quality of his genius, but it is apt to degenerate into extravagance." The Ancient Mariner and Love are excepted from this general condemnation. His transcendentalism is wearisome, "but he sometimes walks upon the earth like other men; and when he does, both his prose and his poetry evince an amiable, cultivated, and original mind."

The Biographia "is certainly an able, and, notwithstanding our author's endless and bottomless discussions on metaphysical matters, upon the whole, an entertaining performance." On the subject of reviews, Coleridge is too sensitive; the exaggerations of hostile and friendly periodicals cancel each other, and the public, like a jury, can estimate the intermediate truth. Against Jeffrey and his review, however, Coleridge has a case. If the former is sincere,

(1) See British Critic New Ser. Vol. 3 p. 460 Nov. 1817

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"if there are some, professing to be judges in these points, who are able to see in the writings of neither [Wordsworth nor Southey], any qualities besides [childishness and extravagance], we really know not how the matter is to be mended by mere discussion."

The poet feels that the lake group have been condemned by Jeffrey on personal not literary grounds. The fact seems to be that Jeffrey is fundamentally insincere. In his review he castigates Wordsworth, and in conversation boasts of admiring him and knowing the Lyrical Ballads by heart; he visits the Lakes, is received by Coleridge whom he flatters and Southey, and publishes an objectionable article on them shortly afterwards. As his excuse is that he paid compliments because he saw that Coleridge liked them, his talk is no more sincere than his writing. His reception in Southey's house should be an "additional argument against passing sentence in the language of contempt and insult." He does not need to flatter, but he can criticise politely.

With Coleridge's analysis of Wordsworth's poetry the British Critic coincides, but finds the subject too long to be discussed in detail. But Coleridge must not pursue his so-called philosophy any further. "His intended commentary upon the Gospel of St. John....will draw down upon his head such a tempest of ridicule and derision, as he may probably live long enough to repent of."

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The Notice in the Monthly Review was mainly a song of triumph at finding Saul among the prophets. Coleridge's bad taste is traced back to the "positive nonsense" instilled into him by his schoolmaster, Bowyer, that Lucretius, Catullus, and Terence are preferable to the Augustans. "The extraordinary criticisms on Mr. Wordsworth" are hailed with delight because Coleridge indicates so many flaws in Wordsworth's theory "that we cannot but here rank Mr. C. among the unintentional defenders of good taste and good sense in poetry." The points that he attacks are so essential that nothing of the theory is left. "By a few extracts from the second volume of this 'Literary Life', we ~~think~~ think that we shall be able to expose the manifest flaws in Mr. W's title to any estate in the manors of Parnassus, Helicon, and the lands lying thereabout." So, with a denial that Wordsworth only rarely practises his theory, the Monthly Review demolishes his claim to be a poet by quoting the most destructive parts of Coleridge's criticism.

We may say a few words on the general tendency of these notices before passing on to Blackwood's Magazine. To parody the Edinburgh's own words, its review is not so properly a review of the book as a reply to it. In fact most of it is fair defence. For example the remarks on Southey as a political writer

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(1) See Monthly Review Vol. 88 p. 124 Feb. 1819



are justified and stated with restraint. Those on poetic diction and poetry are finely and sensitively written. Incidentally, although Wordsworth's poetical status is deliberately ignored, it is a sign of the progressiveness of the Edinburgh Review that such an analysis, which was really in accord with the most modern practice of the times, could find a place in its pages. In view of all this the concluding tirade is singularly misplaced. It is however just the sort of indiscriminate blundering that Hazlitt indulges in when his blood is up, but it has little to do with the Biographia. It is not even true. Perhaps all three poets could be called vain, but certainly neither Wordsworth nor Southey could be called effeminate. The Preface to Lyrical Ballads expressed no "appetite for excitement", and it would be hardly fair to describe even Southey as a flaming apostle of persecution. None of them oscillated in their opinions; they changed once, and slowly, while at least Wordsworth, if not Coleridge also, retained in his heart a steadfast belief in the greatness of the common man, a moral if not a political egalitarianism.

The British Critic holds no particular brief for Coleridge's poetry. but has a high regard for his poetics and shows, as it had done even in the poet's more revolutionary days, an awareness of some of the merits of the Lake group. The Monthly Review apparently had no capacity for absorbing new ideas, and its article might as well have been written in 1807



1807 as in 1817.

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The first article of the first number of Blackwood's Magazine issued under Wilson's and Lockhart's supervision was intended to attract attention by the most violent means. It was Coleridge's misfortune that he was the chosen victim. Any other big name would have done, if any had been available, but the first article at all costs had to show the fire and energy of the new management. The aim of the editors is not to criticise Coleridge but to humiliate him. A disquisition on the uselessness of autobiography in general leads up to a condemnation of Biographia Literaria in particular. It is said to exhibit "many mournful sacrifices of personal dignity." Coleridge's egotism is particularly ludicrous. "He seems to believe that every tongue is wagging in his praise,...to consider the mighty universe itself as nothing better than a mirror in which, with a grinning and idiot self-complacency, he may contemplate the Physiognomy of Samuel Taylor Coleridge." As he has done nothing, this self-adulation is ridiculous. The reviewer sees fit to compare it to poor Joanna Southcote's delusion that she was pregnant with the Saviour when she was distended with flatulence. He proceeds, "The truth is that Mr Coleridge is but an obscure name in English literature. In Scotland few know or

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(1) See Blackwood's Magazine Vol.2 p.3 Oct. 1817

care anything about him.... We cannot see in what the state of literature would have been different had he been cut off in childhood.... This most miserable arrogance seems, in the present age, confined almost exclusively to the original members of the Lake School." But while Wordsworth and Southey have done something memorable, Coleridge has no achievements to his credit. He is contrasted with Scott, "the most original-minded man of this generation of Poets", with Campbell, the great religious poet, with Byron, "the voice of an angel heard crying in the storm or whirlwind", and with Moore the Patriot.

Various incidents in the poet's life are ridiculed. For example, Coleridge's enthusiastic transcribing of Bowles's sonnets is greeted with, "There must be some grievous natural defect in a mind which, even at the age of seventeen, could act so insanely." It is hinted that there is some ulterior motive for the brevity of his remarks on the University, and his subsequent Unitarian preaching is made into a shameful thing; an incident from the tenth chapter, in which Coleridge relates how he was ludicrously overcome by a pipeful of tobacco, being narrated so as to give the impression that he had been drunk. The accusation of having deserted his wife and family is quoted with the comment, "Yet ~~has~~ he, with a humility most unmanly, joined their ranks, and become one of their most slavish sychophants." But that is not enough for Blackwood's; the accusation

must be laid at Coleridge's door again: "Mr Coleridge ought not to deal in general and vague terms of indignation, but boldly affirm, if he dare, that the charge was false then, and would be false now, if repeated against himself." He is, of course, put in the wrong over the Jeffrey controversy: "All the most offensive attacks on the writings of Wordsworth and Southey had been made by Mr Jeffrey before his visit to Keswick. Yet does Coleridge receive him with open arms, according to his own account....and in all respects behave to him with a politeness bordering on servility." Grudging praise is given to the section on Wordsworth, but the attack on Maturin's Bertram "is not the behaviour which one poet ought to show to another."

For this unwarrantable, indecent, and cruel attack reparation was twice made in the columns of Blackwood's. First came a letter signed J.S. addressed to the reviewer of the Biographia in which that book is spoken of as a confession and a warning and therefore not despicable. Coleridge is sometimes "vain - even arrogant" but not contemptible. The reviewer is equally arrogant when he states that Coleridge, though he is well known in London, is ignored in Scotland, thereby insinuating Scotland's superiority. If Coleridge is really unknown in Scotland, why do they make such a vigorous attack on him? If he is a genius as the reviewer admits, why is he

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(1) See Blackwood's Magazine Vol 22 p.285 Dec.1817

ignored in Scotland? The reviewer is guilty of the faults with which he charges the poet, and displays "a rancour more than we can understand against Mr C." No excuse can be made for Jeffrey's treatment of Coleridge. Scott praises Christabel, the reviewer condemns it. "Which shall we believe?" The letter sums up: "You have indeed imitated, with not a little of its power and ability, the worst manner of the Edinburgh Review critics."

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Exactly two years after having dismissed him as a poetical nonentity, the Magazine devoted the whole of a very flattering essay to his poetry. This was the third in a series on the Lake School of Poetry in which Maga sought to popularise the poetry and philosophy of Wordsworth rather than the Lakists in general, an entirely praiseworthy missionary effort. The third essay intends the same service for Coleridge. His unpopularity, which had been formerly made a reproach to him, is now charged against the public, in

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(1) Cf. Lockhart's verdict on the same review - "a specimen of the very worst kind of spirit, which the Magazine professed to be fighting against in the Edinburgh Review." (Peter's Letters II 218)

Could J.S. possibly be John Scott, later of the London Magazine.

(2) See Blackwood's Magazine Vol.6 p.3 Oct.1819



almost identical terms: "The reading-public of England (speaking largely) have not understood Mr Coleridge's poems as they should have done - The reading-public of Scotland are in general ignorant that any such poems exist." The reviews have been very unfair to him! "The ludicrous analysis of serious poems, so common in our most popular reviews," is compared to the flippancy treatment of sacred themes in the Dictionnaire Philoſophique. Coleridge's eccentricities make it easy to mock him, and neglect has driven him to exaggerate his eccentricities.

"In moods of more genial enthusiasm he has created a few poems, which are, though short, in conception so original, and in execution so exquisite, that they cannot fail to render the name of Coleridge co-extensive with the language in which he has written - and to associate it for ever in the minds of all feeling and intelligent men, with those of the few chosen spirits that have touched in so many ages of the world the purest and most delicious chords of lyrical enchantment." All of which may be true, but is scarcely recognisable as applied to the man of whom it had been said two years previously that his death in early childhood would have made no difference to the state of literature. About the Ancient Mariner the essayist waxes rhapsodical: "Above all the poems with which we are acquainted in any language - it is a poem to be felt - cherished - mused upon - not to be talked about - not capable of being analyzed - or

criticised.... How blind, how wilfully, or how foolishly blind must they have been who refused to see any meaning or purpose in the Tale of the Mariner!"

Amongst the rhodomontade of the rest, this last exclamation can command some sympathy, and in spite of overstatement there is a basis of real sensibility in the remarks on the details of the poem. For instance, "It seems as if the very spirit of the universe had been stunned by the wanton cruelty of the Mariner - as if earth, sea, and sky, had all become dead and stagnant in the extinction of the moving breath of love and gentleness."

Speaking of Christabel, the critic draws attention to the praise it received in manuscript and the influence it admittedly had on other poets. Coleridge is quite politely blamed for not using his will-power enough to knock a rough idea into shape. Hard work is needed as well as inspiration. Coleridge's dependence on the latter has resulted in the large number of fragments among his poems. However, "Mr Coleridge is the prince of superstitious poets; and he that does not read Christabel with a strange and harrowing feeling of mysterious dread, may be assured that his soul is made of impenetrable stuff." A long quotation is given, starting with the discovery of Geraldine and going on continuously to the point where she faints on the floor of Christabel's room. Particular praise is given to the contrast between the witch's beauty and wickedness.

To sum up, Coleridge is considered a poet of exquisite rather than wide powers: "A poet of a most noble class - a poet most original in his conceptions - most masterly in his execution - above all things a most inimitable master of the language of poetry.... In his sway of wild - solitary - dreamy phantasies - in his music of words - and magic of numbers - we think he stands absolutely alone among all the poets of the most poetical age.... In [his] use of words the most delicate sense of beauty concurs with much exquisite subtlety of metaphysical perception.... The whole essence of his poetry is more akin to music than that of any other poetry we have ever met with.. .. If there be such a thing as poetry of the sense strung to imagination - such is his. It lies in the senses, but they are senses breathed upon by imagination - having reference to the imagination though they do not reach to it - having a sympathy, not an union, with the imagination - like the beauty of flowers." This, we must observe, is the fullest contemporary statement of Coleridge's peculiar contribution to poetry. Not even in Hazlitt's Examiner article do we get such an appreciation of the poet's qualities. Although many of his critics spoke of him as a great poet, few analysed wherein his greatness lay.

Such an ecstatic article we hope did the poet some service. To the poet it was certainly ample restitution, to the man it was nothing. Neither



explicitly nor implicitly is there withdrawal of or apology for any of the accusations and slights flung so wantonly at Coleridge's character. Perhaps that would be too much to expect. The whole episode was unlikely to win the magazine a reputation for critical integrity.

At this point we may leave the company of Lake Poets. In the thirty years since the issue of Lyrical Ballads they had succeeded in their original intention of educating the public to accept a new kind of poetry. They had even succeeded in making the world realise that they were not really a company of poets, but three individual writers. Wordsworth's fame, as we have seen, had passed the stage of needing to be tended like a delicate flower, although not beyond benefitting from Blackwood's attentions, and had begun the steady growth that finally reached the astonishing flourish of the Kendal days. Coleridge had also carved out his own niche for himself, although he was perhaps better known to other poets than to the public at large. Southey, Poet Laureate, had the smallest poetical reputation of the three, but had made a name, not wholly enviable, for his political and historical writings. It is a measure of their success that in any discussion of contemporary poetry these three are named as among the obviously outstanding figures. If we want a vivid indictment of the change in public attitude brought about mainly by



these poets and the controversy they caused, we may find it by trying to imagine what sort of a reception Wordsworth's Evening Walk would have had in 1818.

The whole poetical landscape was altered, and with few exceptions the critics consciously or unconsciously had adapted themselves to their new environment.

What reader  
does he have in 1793?

## CHAPTER THE FOURTH

## " WE REJOICE TO CONCUR "

While the Lakists were struggling for recognition, some other poets were finding the road to fame quite pleasantly smooth. In the first decade of the century, four names would probably have risen to the lips of the common reader if he had been asked to state who were the greatest living poets. Two of these, Campbell and Rogers, are so irrevocably dead that it would be cruel rather than amusing to search out how often they were promised immortality. The other two, Scott and Crabbe, have managed to keep a place in the public consciousness, and it will not be out of place briefly to enquire what features made them acceptable to the public and the critics of their own time. The question of genius is beside the point; Wordsworth and Coleridge had genius and were rejected; Campbell and Rogers had it not and were accepted. Our problem is rather to find out what two poets so different as Scott and Crabbe had that fitted the taste of their age.

In view of the great unanimity of opinion respecting these two poets, it is not intended to give

a résumé of individual criticisms. (A list of these is however given in an Appendix, where detailed references will be found, along with an indication of the verdict of each review on the particular poem.) Instead a generalised summary is made of the contemporary opinions on each poem.

SCOTT was obviously a romantic poet, writing in flagrant defiance of the rules. Yet he enjoyed a popularity denied to his contemporaries. One undoubted cause of his success was that his verse was facile without being childish, whereas the Lake group though apparently childish were really very difficult to comprehend. His romance was not like Southey's, fetched from the ends of the earth, but mounted in a setting of history and place more or less familiar to his readers. The poet himself had prepared the public mind as well as his own by the editing of the Border Minstrelsy, the last of a series of great compilations which served to awaken the intelligent reader to the beauties of folk literature. Besides, as some critics ultimately realised, Scott was telling in verse the kind of story to which a whole generation of novel-readers were accustomed, and which they consumed with delight.

When the Lay of the Last Minstrel was issued in 1805 it was, therefore, seed put into soil

already ploughed to receive it.. It prospered exceedingly, to the extent of thirty thousand copies in five years, according to Jeffrey, and was well, if not widely, received by the press.

It was generally recognised that Scott had achieved something new, building very cleverly on the old foundations of the ballad, although the critics were rather more dubious as to whether he ought to have built there. As Jeffrey put it, Scott's originality of style "will be allowed to afford satisfactory evidence of the genius of the author, even though he should not succeed in converting the public to his own opinion as to the interest or dignity of the subject." Indeed some of the ballad features are poorly received, particularly the magical elements. Jeffrey calls the Goblin Page "an awkward sort of mongrel between Duck and Caliban," while the Imperial Review wishes, like Wordsworth, "that a stop may be put to the rage for the marvellous and the horrid; it augurs ill of the state of excitability of the public mind when it requires such very powerful stimuli to produce action in it." The loose versification naturally draws some adverse comment, nor was the plot generally admired, although some of the critics had the sense to admit that excellence here was of secondary importance.

On the other hand, the frame-work in which



Scott had set his tangled plot appealed to all the critics. The old bard displayed a certain picturesque quality that disarmed hostility. The same quality pervaded the main story. It was something new and delightful in poetry to have the pageantry and richness of an age of chivalry moving before one. But the chief attraction was the freshness and vitality of the writing. Again and again the critics return to the vigour of the telling, the wildness that never becomes licence, and that completely suited the theme. It was undoubtedly this that endeared the poem to the public. Here at last was something new, something forceful that yet they could all understand. Beside these virtues all trivial errors, like faulty rhymes or dubious grammar, paled into nothingness.

Only one of the five reviews which noticed the poem pronounced an unfavourable verdict. This was the Imperial Review, and the grounds for its decision are such an amazing example of the non-literary elements that may bias a critic that a quotation must be given: "We regret that Mr.Scott should have fettered and degraded the powers of his muse, by uniting them so closely with the cold and groveling pursuits of antiquarianism.... He has carefully collected and exhibited in his notes, the most remarkable instances with which tradition could supply him of the shocking degradation and credulity of the human mind. We should seriously advise these hunters after human weakness and folly, to question themselves respecting

the cui bono of their pursuits; or, at least,...not to vitiate or disgust the public taste by committing the result of their researches to the press. We do not see any possible good that can be derived from knowing the exact extent, and all the minute particulars, of the cruelty, robbery, and superstition of our ancestors: but we do see many injurious consequences that necessarily will be produced."

Of individual passages the two most admired were the description of William of Deloraine, the nearest approach in this poem to a real character, and the picture of Melrose Abbey by moonlight, which in the words of the Critical Review is "almost as highly wrought as the work which it portrays."

Three years later, in 1808, came the more elaborate Marmion, and nearly twice as many critics were waiting to receive it, not quite with open arms. The first freshness having worn off there was now an opportunity of discriminating more carefully the good and bad qualities of the poet. The plot, although some reviewers thought it an improvement on the previous one, was more severely criticised than before. The best that the Critical Review could say on its behalf was that "From a very frequent and diligent perusal we are enabled to make out something of a story.... by connecting the events scattered piecemeal through the work." Now constructing a plot never was a process in which Scott made great achievements. But

he was unsurpassed at spinning a yarn, keeping a mere string of events going in such a way that the reader must follow him. To be able to do so was a native gift, but the yarn he chose was new only to poetry. One critic saw where he had taken it from and what a following it brought him among a public that were not normally poetry-readers, but instead of praising Scott he only used it as another stick to beat him. Speaking of the Lay of the Last Minstrel the Universal Magazine said: "The book was read precisely for the same reason that a novel is read, because it told of goblins and fairies, and castellated mansions.... Mr. Scott is in fact a Mrs. Radcliffe in poetry, but without her occasional elevations." In fact Scott had committed the crime of writing a best-seller, but the critic did not think the present poem likely to offend in this way: "We will venture to prophecy that Marmion ....will repose in humble obscurity, long before the present generation shall pass away." The inaccuracy of the prophecy is of no account; what matters is that the critic saw wherein Scott's power lay, and condemned it. Montgomery in the Eclectic Review simply notes the fact without comment. "His style and subjects [are] peculiarly calculated to fascinate two classes of readers....the Black-letter-men and the Novel readers of the age." No critic seems quite to have got to the root of the matter. Several periodicals, especially the Universal Magazine and the Anti-Jacobin Review, were quite willing to admit that Scott was a second-

rate poet, while as we have just seen, others recognised that he was introducing the novelists' technique into verse. Apparently no one realised that he achieved his success mainly because he told a story extremely well. The best plot can be ruined by a poor narrator, and the worst plot, and Scott's were never good, can hold the reader if it is conveyed in the right way.

Many lesser things than the plot drew adverse comments from the critics. Few of them could find much to say for the jog-trot versification, or for the irregularities with which the jog-trot was diversified. The Critical Review quotes one stanza with the remark, "This passage, we fear, rises nearly to level with the tenor of the whole poem. Such are the blessed effects of introducing the ballad style again," while the Monthly Review sums up with "It is a very easy thing to write five hundred ballad verses, stans pede in uno; but Mr. Scott needs not to be told that five hundred verses written on one foot have a poor chance for immortality." Scott's utter disregard of the minutiae of poetical composition did not find a single apologist. The amount of licence he took, the faulty rhymes, the incorrect grammar, all irritated the critics. In fact, as the Annual Review put it, "such an assemblage of palpable and avoidable faults we seldom have had occasion to notice in any other writer of credit." The critics, even unassisted by Byron's gibe in English Bards, had found a reason for



this carelessness and haste. Jeffrey and the British Critic had protested against the price of his first poem. The Critical Review now went a step further: "The present work appears to have been written by an engagement binding the writer to furnish so many yards of verse, within a certain period, at so much per yard." Later the review recurs to the fact that his writings have been lucrative, "neither do we wish to divert Mr. Scott from his ardent pursuit of what is highly convenient; but he would do well to consider a stipend honourable only when the services of the receiver are proportionable to his rewards." The notes run to a hundred and twenty-six pages. "The odour of gain is indeed sweet!!" Montgomery, the Eclectic reviewer, suggests that it was to give the poem greater length that the Introductory Epistles were included, and everyone agreed that, whatever intrinsic merit they might have, they were certainly out of place in the present poem. The Annual Review put the case against them very sensibly: "This kind of writing, would have been delightful in the hands of Cowper, but it will never answer with Mr. Scott. Sentiment must be the life of it, and he is not the poet of sentiment but of action and manners." Scott's taste was questioned in one further matter. A good number of critics thought that the details of costume and pageantry, the antiquarian descriptions, were drawn out to an unnecessary extent.. They had no

grudge against antiquarianism, but disliked the way in which these descriptive passages held up the action.

On an entirely different plane was the tone adopted towards the character of Marmion. Here, occupying the whole foreground and attracting almost the whole interest, is a "mean and sordid villain," [Edinburgh Review] who is a seducer, a fortune-hunter, and a forger. "Forgery is not a knight-like crime," said the Annual Review, voicing the general opinion, "We can in some circumstances allow the hero of a fine poem to be a villain, but a scoundrel, never. Nor in this case is the temptation nearly strong enough to palliate the crime, or to make it in any degree probable." To make matters worse Scott defeats poetic justice; the virtuous people attain a common-place happiness while Marmion dies "the glorious death of a Wolfe and a Nelson."

Yet taken as a whole, the poem laid a firmer hold on the critical mind than the Lay of the Last Minstrel. It had all the virtues of that poem and two passages touched heights unknown to it. The first is the trial and condemnation of Constance which, although reminiscent of Mrs. Radcliffe, "has," in Montgomery's words, "features of strange horror, and a gloomy sublimity peculiarly its own.... We forgot both the Minstrel and the Mannerist, which rarely happens in reading Mr. Scott's artificial verse." We perhaps do not think of it quite so highly now-a-days, but it still has its thrilling moments. Some contemporary

critics, although admitting that it is a "strong situation", as the London Review calls it, think that it "borrows but little pathos from the language of the poet." The last canto however drew almost unstinted praise and was most liberally quoted from, even for that age of liberal quotations. A few typical opinions may be cited. Jeffrey began by complaining, "We nowhere find any adequate expressions of those melancholy and patriotic sentiments which are still all over Scotland the accompaniment of allusions and recollections [of Flodden]." But he concluded, "Certainly of all the poetical battles which have been fought, from the days of Homer to those of Mr. Southey, there is none, in our opinion, at all comparable, for interest and animation, - for breadth of drawing and magnificent effect, - with this of Mr. Scott's.... From the moment the author gets in sight of Flodden Field, indeed, to the end of the poem, there is no tame writing, and no intervention of ordinary passages."

The Monthly Review concurred. "From this period to the conclusion of the poem, Mr Scott's genius, so long overclouded, bursts forth in full lustre and even transcends itself. It is impossible to do him justice by making extracts when all is equally attractive, and still less by detailing in weak prose the circumstances of his catastrophe."

The Annual Review, as so often it had done in this particular article, showed real discrimination in its



praise. "We no where recollect so noble a description of the kind. It is not the Homeric fight of heroes, so unlike the battles of later times, it is the flight of arrows, the thrust of spears, the sweep of broad-swords, the waving of standards, the press, the throng, the shock of struggling thousands."

The Lady of the Lake (1810) presented little new to the critics. It had no such obvious big moment as Flodden Field, but it had a more exciting plot than the Lay of the Last Minstrel. In the general view it was considered the best of the three because it maintained a more constant standard of achievement.

The usual faults were reprobated in the usual way. As <sup>Hodgson of</sup> the Monthly Review put it, "With due respect, we approach an author whose eminent genius we warmly and freely acknowledge, but whose carelessness in composition is, we conceive, making a rapid progress in barbarizing our language and corrupting our taste." The metre was usually included in this accusation of slovenliness. No one had much objection to the plot this time, although the Monthly and Critical Reviews pointed out that the fiery cross, no matter how vividly its career was narrated, took a very long time to advance the story a very little way. The Christian Observer, with one or two others, disliked the "hard names"; Benvoirlich, for example, "gives an air of pedantry to the whole passage." Opinion was divided on the merits of the lyrics, but Soldier, rest



was frequently quoted.

Two new features gave very general satisfaction. It is worth observing that both marked a move in the direction of the novel. First of all the scene painting was very elaborately carried out. <sup>In</sup> The Quarterly Review <sup>George Ellis</sup> drew attention to the careful observation and accurate drawing that had been employed, while other papers displayed Scott's powers in this field by extracting such things as the opening lines and the descriptions of Loch Katrine. Secondly, some attempt had been made at character drawing. The persons of the poem appear remarkably like lay figures to-day, but they pleased the critics at the time. The Christian Observer compares Fitz-James to Shakespeare's Henry V for his "inborn royalty of soul.... But Ellen, the gentle, generous Ellen, what words can speak her loveliness! This is Mr. Scott's chef d'oeuvre." The European Magazine speaks of the same lady as "our darling Ellen", while the Eclectic Review sums up the general attitude to Roderick in these terms: "Our abhorrence of his ferocity is mingled with respect for his heroic ardour and magnanimity, sympathy with his hopeless passion and pity for his unhappy fate." Although the moral question, therefore, is less acute than with Marmion, the same paper remarks, "It is quite painful, on reflection, to find how strongly and how agreeably we can be made to sympathize with feelings which directly violate almost every article of the decalogue." Wish-fulfilment was not at that

time a word in the critic's vocabulary.

Some of the more frequently cited passages have already been mentioned. The hunt and Ellen's first appearance also attracted praise, but by far the most popular passage was that beginning "Have then thy wish...." in which the sudden appearance of the clansmen does give a moment of electric vitality to the scene.

Two of the criticisms are valuable quite apart from the poem. The Quarterly Review made an elaborate reply to Jeffrey's criticisms of Marmion, and incidentally made some important points on critical theory. In his choice and treatment of subjects Scott followed his own whims. "We, therefore," said the <sup>Ellis of</sup> Quarterly, "who have undertaken to decide on the character of this poem, are compelled, either to acquiesce in the declaration that it is necessarily a compound of absurdity, or to dissent from that proposition, and to canvass our opponents arguments." Jeffrey's central position had been that the faults of Marmion were faults "inseparable from a romance." A résumé of Jeffrey's criticisms are given and it is shown that in fact the faults are caused by Scott's departure from the romantic form. The critic reaches the conclusion that any narrative may be a suitable subject for poetry. In other words, the Quarterly is holding the purely romantic view that a poem makes and justifies its own laws by its own needs. "Multitudes of readers have admired the Lay and Marmion, and will

probably admire the Lady of the Lake, not, as we believe, from disregard or ignorance of the rules of rational criticism, but, because, in a moment of listlessness, they sought for entertainment and found it."

The subject of Scott's popularity, "a pretty sure proof of merit," sends Jeffrey off on one of his interesting and shrewd digressions: "It would not be quite correct, we fear, to say that those are invariably the best judges who are most easily pleased. The great multitude even of the reading world, must necessarily be uninstructed and injudicious; and will frequently be found not only to derive pleasure from what is worthless in finer eyes, but to be quite insensible to those beauties which afford the most exquisite delight to more cultivated understandings." The canons of good taste are decided by those who have most sensibility, knowledge, and experience, namely critics and poets. As they are based on broad universals, taste must become more wide-spread with increased education. The popular and cultivated judgements differ only in degree, not in kind. But fashion changes because fine things lose their quality by becoming hackneyed. They still please newcomers but disgust the discriminating. Eighteenth-century poetic diction affords a good example of this process. In their efforts to escape from it the poets have been driven to many shifts. Some have tried to employ keener observation, others a deeper, if narrower

psychology, esoteric and affected cults have sprung up. The effect has been to make modern poetry more difficult for the reader. In contrast to these schools is the poetry of Scott, who uses common-places fearlessly, and yet freshly, and with no self-consciousness. He lets nothing come between the reader and the story. He arouses familiar emotions with the most obvious stimuli. All his verse is inspired with a "vivifying spirit of strength and animation." To a man with so many claims to popularity Jeffrey had little to object.. The interesting feature of this little historical survey is not only that it is accurate but that, changing circumstances a little, it is true for the turn of another century as well.



CRABBE was a sort of permanent feature of the literary landscape. A relic of the age of Johnson, he was one of the stable things in a changing world. When in 1807 he issued the volume of Poems containing the Parish Register he seemed to most critics like a voice from their childhood, and there was no one but approved of him. He used the old familiar metre and his style was tinged with the old familiar diction. His themes were again roughly of the type in which he had scored his first success. As he was drawing his subject-matter from the same stock as Wordsworth, it is interesting to see why the one was accepted and the other not. The differences of metre and diction explain much, but not everything.

The Annual Review called Crabbe "a kind of Dutch painter," which sums up his method of approach truthfully enough. Crabbe observed and recorded accurately and meticulously. His representations were therefore immediately recognisable. Wordsworth on the other hand suffused his descriptions with emotions and personal reactions; he was in fact concerned with throwing over ordinary things a certain colouring of the imagination whereby they should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect. Jeffrey, as usual, searches out the truth of the matter, and although he is naturally impatient with "all that misguided fraternity, that, with good intentions and extraordinary talents, are labouring to bring back to our poetry the fanastical oddity and puling childishness of

Withers, Charles or Marvel," he analyses the differences between the two types with accuracy: "Mr. Crabbe exhibits the common people of England pretty much as they are; at the same time he renders his sketches in a very high degree interesting and beautiful, by selection of what is fit for description, - by grouping them into such forms as must catch the attention or awake the memory, - and by scattering over the whole such traits of moral sensibility, of sarcasm, and of deep reflection, as everyone must feel to be natural and own to be powerful. The gentlemen of the new school, on the other hand, scarcely ever condescend to take their subjects from any descriptions of persons that are at all known to the common inhabitants of the world; but invent for themselves certain whimsical and unheard of beings, to whom they impute some fantastical combination of feelings, and labour to excite our sympathy for them, either by placing them in incredible situations or by some strained and exaggerated moralisation of a vague and tragical description.... The common sympathies of our nature, and our general knowledge of human character, do not enable us either to understand, or to enter into the feelings of their characters.... Into this unnatural composition, however, they have introduced a great deal of eloquence and beauty, and have put many natural thoughts and touching expressions into the mouths of their imaginary persons. By this means, and by the novelty of manner, they have seduced many into

a great admiration of their genius, and even made some willing to believe, that their conception of character is in itself just and natural." As examples of Lakist character-drawing Jeffrey takes Matthew, Martha Ray, and the 'old annuitant captain' who tells that girl's story, and concludes, "From these childish and absurd affectations, we turn with pleasure to the manly sense and correct picturing of Mr. Crabbe." With all its unfairness and exaggerations, this passage gives us an outline of the real difference between the two poets and also serves to explain why the one was popular and the other was not.

Of Crabbe's correct picturing, a few examples were especially popular. Phoebe Dawson came with a special letter of introduction, but Isaac Ashford and Richard Monday were made just as welcome. The gloomy Hall of Justice impressed most of the critics favourably. The Monthly Review praised it and Sir Eustace Grey as being in the correct style of ballad imitation at the expense of Wordsworth, but the Eclectic Review called it "a tale of excessive horror and abomination." In the same article Montgomery took an unusual view of Crabbe's powers: "Every man of moderate talents may step forth as an original writer, in any path of elegant literature to which his taste inclines him, if he will courageously exercise his powers on those subjects which are most frequently within his view, and of which he has the opportunity of acquiring the greatest knowledge. Of this noble and successful

daring Mr. Crabbe is a signal example." An occasional paragraph like this is a useful counter-blast to more common-place talk about inspiration and genius.

Although praising without stint, the critics did not hesitate to indicate Crabbe's obvious technical limitations. One or two pointers showed from what directions more serious criticism might come. The Universal Magazine objected that the dedication was too fawning, while the Critical, referring to the testimonials quoted in the preface, said, "We feel ourselves emancipated from every duty of praise or censure on the collection before us." Sir Eustace Grey's conversion by Methodists was another stretch of delicate ground. The Universal pleasantly remarked, "As Methodism found him mad, it kept him so." The evangelical Montgomery naturally took the matter seriously: "The change wrought in the mind of the insane Sir Eustace, by 'a methodistic call'....is either the greatest miracle or the greatest absurdity that we ever read of even in verse. We have not room to expose the contradiction involved in this monstrous story."

With the appearance of the Borough in 1810 these complaints became louder. The Eclectic Review in particular developed the charges of servility and bigotry, linking them together with the supposition that Crabbe puffs patrons and abuses sectaries in the



hope of securing preferment in the church. The preface is analysed to show his timid spirit, and the dishonesty and unfairness of his attitude to the Calvinists are discussed at length. The tale of the hypocritical Jachin gives particular offence: "We should be happy to conceive of any good motive he could have, for representing the believer in these truths as a hypocrite and a thief, or for exhibiting them in terms of indecent and profane jocularities. It must be with a very ill grace that he will in future obey the injunction to Timothy, 'young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.'" The frigid Vicar "is another of the numerous instances, in which Mr. Crabbe has certainly not been prompted by an anxiety to employ his influence with the public in assisting the cause of virtue." The Christian Observer seconded the defence of the Dissenters. It liked the picture of the Vicar, "a sort of Will Wimble in orders," but feeling that it ought not to do so, added "As assigned to a clergyman, its triviality is too revolting to be comic." The British Critic supported Crabbe.

More interesting from the literary point of view is the reaction against his preoccupation with the seamy side of life. Practically every review took exception to the disgusting quality of some sketch or other, but the most prominent was the Quarterly, with a thorough-going argument against realism as a legitimate province of poetry. The judgement of that paper, which it takes to be the general judgement, is that

Crabbe "has greatly misapplied great powers; and that, though an able, he is not a pleasing poet." The cult of realism is hostile to the highest pleasures of the imagination, "because it is precisely in order to escape from the world as it is, that we fly to poetry!" As the pleasures of illusion are indulged in every other department of life, it may be legitimately employed in poetry. There are two ways in which poetry helps the mind to escape from reality, by rousing or by soothing it; the latter is the very essence of the pastoral style. Continuing the argument, and in answer to Crabbe's famous lines on pastoral poetry, the review goes on to show that a pastoral is false only if it is taken as a representation of real life and manners. Anyone who does so is being absurdly sentimental, failing to distinguish fiction from fact. "If therefore the poet choose to illustrate the department of low life, it is peculiarly incumbent on him to select such of its features, as may at least be inoffensive.... No department of life, however darkened by vice or sorrow, is without some brighter points on which the imagination may rest with complacency." This elaborate condemnation of realism should be noticed as an indication of how the critical mind was moving towards the false romanticism of the Victorian era. The other critics did not try thus to reason Crabbe out of poetical existence. Their objection was rather to the frequency with which they could say with the Christian Observer, "It is not

enough that his hero should be vulgar; he must also be vile, and his fate must not only be tragical, but loathsome." Jeffrey pointed out that disgust, which is too often aroused by Crabbe, is caused in the non-physical sphere by misery, where nothing appeals to our love or admiration, although a disgusting theme may serve a moral purpose.

The usual minor faults are reprobated. The minuteness of his detail was sometimes tiresome. As the Critical Review put it, "Mr Crabbe seldom seems to know when he has said enough: his best thoughts are frequently amplified till what we began to read with pleasure is finished with a long and drawling yawn." The general plan of The Borough did not give satisfaction. It is lacking in unity and arrangement, the accurate and individual portraits lose effect because they are without grouping or composition.

In spite of all these complaints, every critic found something to admire and most of them were enthusiastic. Crabbe's abstract merits had not changed and we need not repeat the encomiums upon them. It was the individual sketches that attracted most attention. The tenement slum was frequently quoted, and the portraits of Blaney, Clelia, and Peter Grimes were generally admired, except where the critic found himself morally disgusted. The Quarterly remarked on the exquisite detail and subtlety of Crabbe's psychology, especially in portraying remorse and madness.

The remarks on the Tales in Verse (1812) added little new that had any direct bearing on Crabbe himself. As there is less sordid poetry in this volume, the complaints about the disgusting sink into insignificance. By contrast there is an increasing emphasis on the "consistent moral and beneficial tendency" (Edinburgh Review) of his poetry. These tales certainly have some of the qualities of the apologue or of the cautionary novel. But the emphasis ought to be noted.

Jeffrey, however, went off on another interesting digression. Before following him, we may quote a passage in which he praises in Crabbe what had been censured in Wordsworth. " [Crabbe] has combined the natural language and manners of humble life with the energy of true passion, and the beauty of generous affection,.... and unfolded, in the middling orders of the people, the workings of those finer feelings, and the stirrings of those loftier emotions which the partiality of other poets had hitherto attributed almost exclusively to actors on a higher scene." For this reason Jeffrey is sure "the body of the people" will enjoy the Tales more than any other class. The poor supply of good literature for such readers leads Jeffrey on to an estimate of the size of the reading public. "In this country there are probably not less than 200,000 persons who read for amusement or instruction among the middling classes of society. In the



higher classes there are not so many as 20,000. It is easy to see therefore which a poet should chuse to please for his own glory and emolument, and which he should wish to delight and amend out of mere philanthropy. The fact too we believe is, that a great part of the larger body are to the full as well educated and as high-minded as the smaller; and, though their taste may not be so correct and fastidious, we are persuaded that their sensibility is greater.... We are quite positive, not only that persons in middling life would naturally be most touched with the emotions that belong to their own condition, but that those emotions are in themselves the most powerful, and consequently the best fitted for poetical or pathetic representation,...and as to all the more tender and less turbulent affections, upon which the beauty of the pathetic is altogether dependent, we apprehend it to be quite manifest, that their proper soil and nidus is the privacy and simplicity of humble life."

What vistas this passage opens up! The latter part of it, coupled with the shorter paragraph on the possibility of noble emotions in a humble breast, suggests that Jeffrey was nearer an appreciation of Wordsworth than his actual criticisms of the poet suggest. Here, in fact, he is stating in no uncertain voice one of the vital parts of Wordsworth's creed as clearly as the poet had done. The natural conclusion is that Jeffrey after ten years was ripe for some part of Wordsworth's philosophy, provided it

was divorced from the poet and his mysticism, and not expressed in childish forms. Crabbe in many ways was a sort of inverted Wordsworth, taking a pessimistic interest in the people where the other was optimistic. It would be interesting to know how far the writings of the Lake School promoted Crabbe's popularity.

A wider problem is that of catering for the reading public. It should be noticed that even at this early date a sensitive journalist like Jeffrey is conscious of a split between the literate and the cultured. To the former he ascribes a greater, we might say a less disciplined sensibility and a less fastidious taste. But as we have seen from his remarks on the Lady of the Lake he trusted to education to rectify these deficiencies. That however is a slow process, and in the meantime what was to become of the lower two-hundred thousand? Were they to resort to the Barbaulds and Trimmers for their instruction and the trashy stock-in-trade of the circulating libraries for their amusement? The problem is further complicated by the apparent impossibility of thinking of literature for such readers without thinking of a "consistent moral and beneficial tendency" at the same time. Jeffrey at least draws the attention of the men of letters to the fact that there is a market ten times more profitable outside the usual circle of Society. He further implies that it is possible to please the "middling classes" without writing down to them, by choosing situations and emotions which they can under-

stand. Crabbe certainly fitted his requirements, and so, with a difference, did Scott. Literature did follow the course indicated by Jeffrey as the most profitable, though not in his generation, hardly even in the next. But how aptly his suggestions would fit a description of the aims of the Victorian writers! The moral preoccupation, the emotional rather than intellectual appeal, the love of pathos (especially the pathos of humble life), even a suggestion of literature for the family circle - all are there. There were two danger signals in Jeffrey's observations - greater sensibility - less correct and fastidious taste. Was excess or deficiency here corrected by the writers of genius who fed the greater reading public of the Victorian period? After Dickens and Tennyson had done their work were the middling classes more discriminating than their grandfathers had been? He would be a bold man who returned an unhesitating affirmative to these questions. Yet if the general taste and sensibility did not become more delicate in those years, the great authors had in effect written themselves down. In the course of the ensuing chapters we shall see in what ways it can be justly said that the public taste became degraded or improved. At the risk however of anticipating matter which will be more fully developed at a later point, the judgement implied in this paragraph must be slightly modified. If Jeffrey had been able to make another similar survey half a century later, could he have spoken of

twenty and two hundred thousand? The reading public had increased tremendously and it would have been difficult to sort out a group corresponding to the middling classes of 1812. But if it could have been done Jeffrey would probably have been able to say that education had done its work, and that a writer of taste and genius could hope to appeal to a wider public than his predecessor in the era of Scott and Crabbe.



The conclusion of the careers of the two poets we have been considering in this chapter brings us to a natural pause in the history of the times, and it would be advantageous to take stock and observe what was passing away, what was to come. The year 1810 saw the last flare-up of the great stars that had inaugurated the century. The Lake Poets were virtually written out; Crabbe and Scott had come to the end of their poetical resources. In these ten years they had completely altered the face of the poetical landscape. It would be a mistake to call Wordsworth a popular poet in 1810, but he had made and was to continue to make a deep impression on the most sensitive young minds of his day - Shelley, Byron, Keats, Hazlitt, John Wilson; James Montgomery, to name only a handful. Wordsworth had opened new windows on to nature, and on to man. Coleridge's influence was more subtle, and often indirectly felt - the history of the Christabel metre is a case in point - and though his best work was done by 1810, most of it was not published till long after that date. Southey and Scott between them had restored to an honourable place almost every type of romantic subject from historical chivalry to fantastic magic. Crabbe too had brought new themes into the realms of literature. His interest in psychology deserves special consideration, for no matter how old-fashioned he might appear in other respects here Crabbe was in the forefront of his time, and we must look for his literary descendants not among the poets but among

the novelists.

The five years between 1810 and Waterloo would have been dead blanks but for the appearance of two new luminaries - Byron and the Author of Waverley. The low literary vitality of these, the bitterest years of the war, is not surprising. The tension and absorption of such a fierce struggle are not conducive to imaginative activity. But when the war was over there came an outbreak of literary productivity surpassing its predecessor in quality and quantity.

The new activity shows some important differences from the movement that had initiated the century, although it developed out of it. Byron was the harbinger of an era of poetry which superficially was more akin to the older traditions of English poetry. The stanza and nominal framework of his most famous poem were both Spenserian. Shelley, Keats, and Hunt were more nearly in the lineage of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. Technically though not in spirit all of them were far nearer the roots of English poetry than Wordsworth was, although we must not overlook the affinities of Coleridge to that older style. But undoubtedly Wordsworth was to them the master poet of his generation. Byron felt his influence least of all, but to Shelley Wordsworth's beliefs were the point from which his own philosophising developed, and Keats was constantly contrasting the genius of Wordsworth with Milton or Shakespeare. In one respect, however, all these writers showed a

marked break with the Wordsworthian code; in their choice of subject matter they sought after the exotic, a practice against which Wordsworth had sternly set his face although Southey had freely indulged in it. Here Shelley and Southey showed themselves the most nearly related, and Shelley's experiments in free verse made another tie between them.

Another vital development of imaginative literature is represented by Scott's reappearance as a novelist. From its original honourable estate the novel had fallen upon evil days. Thanks to the success of Mrs. Radcliffe and Fanny Burney, the market was flooded with tales horrible or tales cautionary which comprised the literary pabulum of the less intellectual members of the reading public. To be caught reading a novel was to be in a situation from which a man escaped by some shamed-faced excuse, for a girl of course it was just what was expected. Scott and Jane Austen between them carried the novel far on the road to respectability. Later it was to reach heights of which neither of them could dream. That however is a field on which we do not trespass here.

With the conclusion of the war and the demobilisation of the huge armies came a sudden dislocation of the social machine. To the unemployed soldiery there fell to be added the factory hands and farm labourers struck by the post-war slump. As John Galt wrote, "Peace brought calamities, in so much that

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(1) See Galt, Literary Life Vol.2 p.36

even statesmen openly confessed that the 'revulsion' puzzled their science. How was Britain to be made a land fit for heroes to live in? Were these unfortunate people really heroes? The difficulty of answering such questions caused a sharp rise in the political temperature. The Tories saw no solution but more and harsher repression; the Whigs were more insistent on reform than before. The next fifteen years were to see the old abuses, which had been ignored in the all-absorbing concentration on the war, assailed and swept away one by one before the rising tide of public indignation, but not without fierce resistance. When the last gun was silent on the field of Waterloo, the war on the home front had begun, nor was the literary field the quietest sector.